

## Propoxyphene

### Introduction

A useful, lethal drug, still prescribed in a handful of countries, is 'Propoxyphene'. The drug is marketed under various names and used as an oral analgesic (pain reliever). If prepared in a certain way, and taken in combination with a common benzodiazepine sleeping pill such as oxazepam (Serepax), propoxyphene will provide a reliable, peaceful and dignified death.



Fig 11.1 Propoxyphene capsules (Doloxene)

## *Propoxyphene*

### **The Various Forms of Propoxyphene**

Propoxyphene is marketed under a number of names, examples include Darvon, Doloxene, and Depronal.

Regardless of its name, the key necessary ingredient is propoxyphene – either as the hydrochloride or napsylate, and it is important that the drug labels are read very carefully. In some video segments included in this chapter the name Doloxene is used to refer to propoxyphene.

Propoxyphene capsules have only one active ingredient (dextropropoxyphene napsylate). However, the drug propoxyphene is often marketed in combination with other common analgesics such as paracetamol (acetaminophen) and marketed as Di-Gesic (Darvocet).

These combination products are of limited use. Taking a large amount of the associated drug can complicate the process. The ingestion of a substantial quantity of paracetamol (acetaminophen) for example may well lead to death, but it would not be regarded as particularly peaceful.

*Note: With the withdrawal of the barbiturate sleeping tablets from the medical prescribing list, Doloxene has become the most common doctor-prescribed medication used by seriously ill people to end their lives. Recently, the unique properties of Doloxene have begun to attract attention; first in the UK, then New Zealand and more recently in the US and Canada where it has now been removed from the prescribing schedule.*

## **When is Propoxyphene Prescribed?**

Propoxyphene (dextropropoxyphene napsylate) is almost always available from a doctor on prescription, where it is used for pain management. Propoxyphene is usually prescribed when over-the-counter pain relievers prove inadequate and when other, more common prescription pain-relievers (eg. Panadeine Forte or Tylenol-Codeine - a mixture of paracetamol and codeine) prove unsatisfactory.

Propoxyphene can be used whenever there is a need for general pain relief. Before their removal in 2010 in the US (and Canada), propoxyphene and combinations were the 12th most prescribed generic drug (Public Citizen, 2006)

## **How Lethal is Propoxyphene?**

Propoxyphene has a very narrow therapeutic margin. The difference in dose between that providing analgesia and that causing death is small. Like the opioids, the outcome from a particular dose can be difficult to predict, but this drug produces a cardiotoxic metabolite when it breaks down which increases its usefulness as a self deliverance agent.

When another drug, the readily-available, non-lethal sleeping tablet, oxazepam, is added, along with alcohol, the result is certain. Exit has no reported failures from this combination.

As the reputation of propoxyphene has grown, so script sizes have been reduced. The standard packaging number for propoxyphene is now 50 capsules. All capsules contain the same 100mg of dextropropoxyphene napsylate.

## *Propoxyphene*

If 10gm of dextropropoxyphene napsylate powder is obtained from 100 capsules and taken with 10 or more moderately, long-acting sleeping tablets like oxazepam, death will follow.

Propoxyphene is usually prescribed at the rate of 4-6 capsules per day (400 - 600 mg) to deal with pain. Ten grams of the drug would provide around 2 to 3 weeks of pain control.

### **The Role of Oxazepam**

Oxazepam (Serepax) is a moderately long-acting, non-lethal sleeping tablet. Another moderately long-acting sleeping tablet often used in combination with propoxyphene is nitrazepam (Mogadon). These modern sleeping tablets are members of a drug class known as benzodiazepines and when taken by themselves are not usually lethal, even if taken in large amounts. When taken in combination with propoxyphene, oxazepam or nitrazepam reinforce the effect of a propoxyphene and a lethal combination is the result.



Fig 11.2: The common sleeping tablet - oxazepam (Serapax)

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*Note: Duration of action of the benzodiazepine is important - shorter acting drugs like temazepam are not recommended.*

### **When is Oxazepam Prescribed?**

Well known as sleeping drugs, oxazepam and nitrazepam are available on prescription from a doctor. They are prescribed for insomnia (when a person is unable to sleep). Oxazepam is usually prescribed in packets containing 25 sleeping tablets, which come in two sizes, 15mg and 30mg.

People using propoxyphene, often take a full packet of 30mg oxazepam tablets as the supplement.

### **Using Propoxyphene**

The drugs are taken sequentially. Prepare the propoxyphene by pulling apart 100 x 100mg capsules (or cut them open with scissors) and empty the 10gm white dextropropoxyphene napsylate powder into a glass. In another glass place 10 or more 30mg oxazepam tablets and cover them with water.

It is wise to take an anti-emetic (eg metoclopramide) either as a single stat dose or for 48 hours before the planned death. After having something light to eat, add enough water to the 10gm of propoxyphene powder so that stirring allows the drug to be drunk. Note: the napsylate does not dissolve in the water, stir with a spoon and then drink the suspension of particles. Stir the second glass with the oxazepam and water till this also can be taken as a drink.



Fig 11.3: 100mg pink Propoxyphene Capsules

Alcohol is useful to take away the bitter drug after-taste and will speed the process. Sit comfortably. In 10 - 20 minutes sleep will occur and death will follow usually in 4 - 6 hours.

### **Shelf Life of Doloxene**

Propoxyphene has a relatively long shelf life. Prescribed capsules have an expiry date stamped on each card and this is usually 2 or 3 years into the future. Although this provides only a rough guide, in the absence of any available testing of the drug, it is the only indication one has. Capsules that have reached their expiry date should be treated with caution (See earlier Chapter on discussion on shelf life).

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### **The Future of Propoxyphene**

Propoxyphene faces an uncertain future. The withdrawal of the drug from the prescription schedule in the UK in early 2005. The drug has also been withdrawn in the European Union, the US, Canada and in New Zealand. In November 2010 the FDA announced that the drug would be also removed from the US market.

See: <http://nyti.ms/9iPzgD>

At the time of press, propoxyphene is still available on prescription in Australia, Mexico and a range of South American and Asian countries.

### **Legal comment**

Not surprisingly, both Propoxyphene and Oxazepam can be lawfully possessed if they have been prescribed by a physician. While Oxazepam is a widely prescribed drug, only in Australia is Propoxyphene still able to be prescribed. In Australia, maximum penalties for the importation of Propoxyphene and Oxazepam are no more than 3 times the value of the import or \$180,000 (whatever is the greater maximum penalty).

In the UK, Propoxyphene and Oxazepam are Class C drugs with maximum penalties of 14 years imprisonment for importation and an unlimited fine limit.

In the US, importers of Propoxyphene will generally face up to one year imprisonment and a \$1,000 fine. Oxazepam is a Schedule IV controlled substance the importation of which holds the importer liable for up to five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.



Fig 11.5: Propoxyphene powder ready for mixing with water



Fig 11.6: 10gm propoxyphene ready to drink



## **RP Test for Propoxyphene**

Propoxyphene scores well on the RP Test. Exit has no confirmed reports of failure and it rates 9/10 for Reliability. The time before sleep occurs is longer than other drugs like Nembutal and this can cause anxiety. Peacefulness (7/10).

In the minor categories: Availability is listed at 4/5. Most people who set out to get this drug will acquire it. Remember though that if the drug is withdrawn, availability will drop to zero. Preparation is more complicated than with other ingestibles (Pr=3/5). The drug is undetectable - unless there is an autopsy, although constricted pupils may cause suspicion (D=3/5). The process is slow (Sp=2/5) the drug presents no risk to others (Sa=5/5). The drug has a moderate shelf life (St=3/5). Total 36 or 72%

### **RP Test for Propoxyphene**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Score</b>
<i>Reliability</i>	<b>9/10</b>
<i>Peacefulness</i>	<b>7/10</b>
<i>Availability</i>	<b>4/5</b>
<i>Preparation</i>	<b>3/5</b>
<i>Undetectability</i>	<b>3/5</b>
<i>Speed</i>	<b>2/5</b>
<i>Safety</i>	<b>5/5</b>
<i>Storage</i>	<b>3/5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>36 (72%)</b>