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Editorial

Novel Psychoactive Substances: shedding new lights on the ever-changing drug scenario and the associated health risks

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There is no better time for a Special Issue on Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS). Over the last decade there has been a dramatic and unprecedented increase in the number of new drugs discovered or synthesized. This has become a matter of global concern, since these novel substances comprise a serious threat to public health. NPS have become rapidly available in the drug market with barely any knowledge about their side effects, toxicity, or the health risks they pose to users. Misleadingly called “legal highs” (Corazza et al., 2013), NPS are often advertised on the Internet as “legal and safer” alternatives to illicit drugs. They also appear as increasingly sophisticated chemical structures, with many potential adverse effects on health and well-being. The EU Early Warning System currently monitors over 560 new substances, with over 70% of these identified in the last five years (EMCCDA 2016). Indeed by July 2016, 102 countries and territories had reported 644 NPS to the UNODC ‘Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analysis, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme’; this far exceeds the 234 substances currently scheduled under the International Drug Control Conventions (UNODC 2016).

In this timely Special Issue, we capture the latest original research in the field. Most of the works are based on the presentations by authors at the 4th International Conference on Novel Psychoactive Substances, which was held in Budapest in May 2016. This is the largest event on NPS internationally and the next edition will be held

at the United Nations in Vienna, during October 2017. Motivated by the need to share updated evidence-based information among the academic community, and supported by the Editor-in-Chief Prof David Baldwin, and the Editorial Assistant Dr Andrew Mayers, we are delighted to present the third special issue on Novel Psychoactive Substances. Like the three previous NPS conferences (Corazza et al, 2013; Parrott and Corazza, 2015), this special issue is being published in the leading international journal for NPS research: 'Human Psychopharmacology'.

Cited by thousands of colleagues working in the field, the growing success of our collective effort has been confirmed by the largest number of contributions for this latest Issue. Each contribution presents some unique insights into this complex field; they include insights into drug detection, performance assessment, neurocognitive and other adverse consequences, epidemiology, subjective experiences, and many others. Attention is also paid to emerging topics of discussion, such as the role played by the digital world in driving sudden changes in patterns of substance abuse, and providing novel mechanisms for global marketing and drug sales. The Internet has facilitated access to information on chemical synthesis, which has enabled amateur chemists to stay ahead of the regulators by rapidly generating many novel chemical structures. It has also enabled the sharing of experiences between consumers, with some sites hosting discussion forums, while others provide mechanisms for buyer feedback and subjective ratings. Analyses of the most hidden aspects of the net, such as the spread of NPS within the *deep* and *dark* webs, will also be offered.

Overall, we hope that this NPS Special Issue sheds some new light on this rapidly-changing drug scenario. We believe it is crucial to share and enhance all our multidisciplinary knowledge in this field. Hopefully we may also anticipate some of the forthcoming challenges, in order to be optimally prepared for the future. Please read and enjoy.

Ornella Corazza, Andy Parrott and Zsolt Demetrovics.

Guest Editors, May 2017.

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