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## The BMJ Press Release

### Patient advises doctors about dangers of “Spice”

*Author draws on personal experience of homelessness to warn doctors about growing problem of legal highs*

“In over 30 years of recreational drug use, I have never been as worried about any drug as I have about Spice,” says a former homeless patient in **The BMJ** today.

Ian was asked to write for the journal after raising the issue at a Homelessness and Health conference. His article is part of The BMJ’s ‘What Your Patient is Thinking’ series - to encourage doctors and patients to work together to improve healthcare.

Ian draws on personal experience of living on the streets and living and working in hostels and day care centres to advise doctors how to spot patients using drugs known as “Spice” that are spreading quickly on the streets.

Spice is sold in bags of combustible vegetable matter, which has been sprayed with a variety of chemicals, each producing slightly different versions of the same type of buzz, explains Ian. Because of the way Spice is mass produced, there can be huge inconsistencies in its strength from batch to batch.

Ian suggests that if doctors suspect a patient is using Spice, “look for clues such as a strong burnt smell on his or her breath.”

He has noticed that Spice “triggers a heightened awareness of the senses” and “depending on the mood that people are in when they take Spice, their imaginations run wild in any direction.”

As such he advises not to get in the way of people who are using this drug, but to “talk calmly and try to get them to sit or lie down for 15 minutes until the initial high subsides.”

Ian says he has met a few people who have had no ill effects when withdrawing from prolonged use of Spice, “but most people tell me they have classic withdrawal symptoms such as cramping, sweating, and twitching.”

But the biggest worry is the psychological effect, he says “as many people have told me that the use of Spice leads to very low moods, with thoughts of self harm or suicide.”

“We have absolutely no idea of the short term effects of using Spice, let alone the long term effects on the brain,” he warns. And he urges healthcare staff to report any problem in their area to help map the spread of the drug.

[Ends]

**Note to Editors:**

Article: A voice from the streets about Spice

<http://www.bmj.com/content/353/bmj.i2708>

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