



NEW TREATMENT FOR ICE USERS WORLD FIRST STUDY RESULTS

- EMBARGOED UNTIL 1AM SATURDAY 1 DECEMBER 2007 -

A new treatment for methamphetamine or 'ice' has been found to assist users to dramatically reduce their drug use, a study released yesterday has found.

The first results from an Australian drug trial for methamphetamine or "ice" users funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing were presented yesterday at the World Psychiatric Association Congress in Melbourne.

Mr James Shearer, a PhD student from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at UNSW conducted the study.

"The drug, known as modafinil, restores levels of neurotransmitters or chemicals in the brain that may be depleted after heavy or long term methamphetamine use," said Mr Shearer. "It's already available in Australia for sleep problems such as narcolepsy, shift workers' syndrome and sleep apnoea related fatigue."

Studies in the United States have shown modafinil to be safe and effective in cocaine users. Modafinil is presently in larger scale studies to definitively establish its value in treating cocaine addiction in the US.

This Australian study set a world first by testing modafinil against a placebo in 80 dependent methamphetamine users in Sydney. Patients either took modafinil each day over a 10 week treatment program or a placebo or dummy drug under double blind conditions (i.e. neither the doctors nor the patients knew which drug they were taking).

Those who received modafinil cut their methamphetamine use by more than half which was significantly better than those who received the placebo. Importantly, modafinil appeared to be safe with no serious side effects and non-addictive. Because modafinil is not soluble in water and is destroyed at high temperatures, it cannot be injected or smoked, and may not need to be dispensed under supervision.

“Modafinil is the first medication to show a demonstrable positive effect in heavy methamphetamine users and represents a major medical breakthrough achieved in Australia,” said Mr Shearer.

“With the range of problems currently being experienced in Australia due to the use of methamphetamine, modafinil could prove to be an invaluable treatment.”

“The researchers at NDARC, the Kirketon Road Centre facility of Sydney Hospital and St Vincent’s Hospital Drug and Alcohol Service in Sydney, hope that these positive results lead to continuing Federal Government support for larger clinical trials of modafinil.”

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Contact Details: Paul Dillon, tel. 9385 0226 or 0419 402 099, email p.dillon@unsw.edu.au *Date Issued: November 30 2007*