

Letters to the Editor

Discussion of "Identification of Drugs and Their Derivatives"

Sir:

The paper by Wilkinson et al, "Identification of Drugs and Their Derivatives," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, Vol. 21, No. 3, July 1976, pp. 564-574, presented a view of drug analysis that is radically different from that of many crime labs that routinely identify controlled substances with instrumental methods. Other aspects of the report are equally disturbing. Consider a few points.

Derivative formation adds little to the analysis of propoxyphene or meperidine; homologs of each compound give the same product as the parent compound upon hydride reduction. Sufficient analysis of either propoxyphene or meperidine can consist of the comparison of an infrared spectrum with a reference standard. Either compound can be obtained as the hydrochloride simply by washing a portion of a tablet or capsule with chloroform, unless other active ingredients are present.

The proposed metabolic conversion of propoxyphene to meperidine would require some unique processes not observed by others (see Finkle et al, *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Oct. 1976, pp. 706-742). Furthermore, if the metabolic conversions could occur, they would lead to prodine, not meperidine.

Jimmy R. Daniel
Bureau of Investigation
North Carolina Department of Justice
421 North Blount Street
Raleigh, N.C. 27601

Author's Reply

Sir:

I appreciate the opportunity of replying to Mr. Daniel's letter.

We were interested in studying two compounds of importance in our geographical area—indomethacin and atropine. Our approach was to study more familiar compounds such as propoxyphene and meperidine and to apply the information obtained to the compounds of interest. We have done this and have presented papers on our work at the National American Chemical Society Meeting in New Orleans, La., 1977.

The purpose of a journal such as the *Journal of Forensic Sciences* is to publish information of interest or of use to its readers. It doesn't matter whether or not this information is "radically different" but rather if the readers can take this information and apply it to their problems. If only papers that re-cover traditional analytical procedures are published the journal becomes one of history, not science.

In summary, we are not interested in the fact that there are better methods of analyzing for propoxyphene or meperidine, and we hoped your readers would not take a narrow outlook of this paper. Our purpose was to say, "Here is a different approach, use it if you can, modify it if you wish, ignore it if you don't need it, but don't ask journals to stop publishing papers because they don't seem useful at the time."

Donald R. Wilkinson, Ph.D.
Professor of Chemistry
Dept. of Chemistry
Delaware State College
Dover, Del.

The Committee on Alcohol and Drugs, National Safety Council, at its Annual Meeting in Chicago on 20 Oct. 1977, passed the motion reaffirming the following 1975 statement.

D. M. Lucas, Chairman
Committee on Alcohol and Drugs
National Safety Council

Formal Statement of Committee on Alcohol and Drugs, National Safety Council, Chicago, Ill., Oct. 2, 1975

“Some issues have been raised in the California Supreme Court’s decision in *People v. Hitch* and allied cases in which the court held that chemicals and ampoules used in breath test cases must be preserved for possible pre-trial examination and analysis by defendants should they so demand it. A review of the scientific merits of this position has been made. It is concluded that at the present time, a scientifically valid procedure is not known to be available for the re-examination of a Breathalyzer ampoule that has been used in the breath test for ethanol, in order to confirm the accuracy and reliability of the original breath analysis.”

Passed unanimously by the Executive Board Oct. 2, 1975, and later by the full Committee on a mail ballot without a dissenting vote.

J. D. Chastain, Chairman
National Safety Council
Committee on Alcohol and Drugs