

There has been a significant increase in the abuse of prescription drugs Pregabalin and Gabapentin, especially amongst prison inmates and heroin addicts, reports the 2014 annual DrugScope survey.

The survey is based on information from the police, drug action teams and frontline drug workers in 17 towns and cities across the UK.

Pregabalin and Gabapentin are typically prescribed for conditions such as epilepsy, neuropathic pain and anxiety. When the drugs is mixed with depressants it can have devastating side effects including respiratory failure and even death; in 2013 41 death certificates mentioned the two drugs, official reports show.

“We have seen a big rise in the illicit use of pregabalin and gabapentin,” quoted one drug worker for the survey. “The effects are horrendous and life threatening. People become so heavily intoxicated because they are mixing several drugs at a time.

“The drugs can reduce the heart rate and if taken with methadone can be extremely dangerous, so we now have to consider whether people are using these drugs when we prescribe methadone,” they added.

GPs and other medical prescribers have been asked to take more care in prescribing these types of drugs to ensure that they do not fall in the wrong hands or end up on the ‘black’ market, says the report.

There were 8.2 million prescriptions issued for the two drugs in 2013, representing an increase of 46% in Gabapentin in two years and a 53% in Pregabalin, warns Public Health England and NHS England.

There has also been an increase in the level of use of the drug by prison inmates in England and Wales. There are more than 1,800 inmates being prescribed Gabapentin or Pregabalin,

representing nearly 3% of the prison population, shows a recent study.

The DrugScope survey report also found that there is an increase in the street level purity of cocaine, ecstasy and heroin across most towns in the UK.

“Experts suggest the hike in quality is down to two interlinking factors: falling wholesale drug prices that have enabled Class A suppliers to improve their product in the face of competition from cheap yet potent new psychoactive substances.” said Max Daly, author of the DrugScope survey report.

Not only did the report find evidence to suggest that there is a rapid increase in prescription drug misuse in the UK but also a rise in the use of new psychoactive substances, or ‘legal highs’ as they are more commonly known.

Source: [Alan Travis, The Guardian, 2015](#)