



Selected Papers of William L. White

www.williamwhitepapers.com

Collected papers, interviews, video presentations, photos, and archival documents on the history of addiction treatment and recovery in America.

Citation: White, W. (2014). "Ts and Blues" and the phenomenon of planned synergism. Posted at www.williamwhitepapers.com.

"Ts and Blues" and the Phenomenon of Planned Synergism

William L. White

Emeritus Senior Research Consultant
Chestnut Health Systems
bwhite@chestnut.org

NOTE: The original 1,000+ page manuscript for *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* had to be cut by more than half before its first publication in 1998. This is an edited excerpt that was deleted from the original manuscript.

The mid-1970s was a strange time for heroin addicts on the streets of Chicago. The traditional trafficking channels that had placed a low-grade but consistently available Asian heroin on the streets of Chicago were breaking up and giving way to new channels that were delivering Mexican brown heroin. During this transition, there were days when addicts couldn't find heroin to buy in Chicago. Sick addicts began experimenting with almost any drug or drug combination that would medicate their discomfort. Such experimentation led to the discovery of a heroin substitute that became pervasive among Chicago heroin users and then spread to other cities with large addict populations.

The heroin substitute, known in the illicit drug culture as "Ts and Blues" was a combination of pentazocine (a synthetic painkiller market under the trade name Talwin) and pyribenzamine, a common antihistamine found in many over-the-counter medicines. The two drugs were crushed and mixed together in solution,

"cooked down," and injected intravenously like heroin. Chicago addicts capitalized on the synergistic interaction between the two drugs to create an effect greater than could be expected from either drug. The problem of "Ts and Blues" dominated opiate-oriented addiction treatment centers until the pentazocine was brought under greater legal control via placement in Schedule II and Mexican brown heroin became consistently available (White, 1978).

"Ts and Blues" was not the first or the last drug trend that involved planned synergism. It was followed by reports of "Dors and 4s" (glutethimide [Doriden] and codeine), "Space Base" (PCP and cocaine), "Lace" (cannabis and cocaine) and a variety of other cannabis preparations boosted with other psychoactive ingredients. Heroin addicts who learned how to mix barbiturates with heroin to potentiate the latter's effects continued this practice through the 1970s and 1980s until heroin purity rose precipitously in the 1990s. The combination of low purity opiates and barbiturates was

often referred to in the illicit culture as "Karachi."

Planned synergism poses enormous nightmares to the traditional system of studying and controlling drugs. What we know about each drug and our legal scheduling of each drug is based on a study of the drug in isolation. With "Ts and Blues," drug policy leaders encountered two drugs, neither of which had a high addiction potential in isolation, but which when combined posed high risks for adverse effects, including dependence. Future episodes of planned synergism will likely create situations where two or more relatively harmless drugs (even over-the-counter drugs) could in combination elicit new patterns of addiction that will challenge both our treatment technology and our methods of legal control.

References

White, W. (1978). The use and abuse of Pentazocine (Talwin) in Illinois: A review with control recommendations. Chicago, IL: Illinois Dangerous Drugs Commission. Also in *Drugperspective*. (1978). Rockville, MD: National Drug Abuse Center/National Institute on Drug Abuse.