Drug Detection in Impaired Victorian Drivers

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Background:
New legislation introduced in December 2000 allowed Victoria Police to use Standard Field Sobriety Test procedures to determine the likelihood of an apparently impaired driver being under the influence of drugs. These methods have been very successful in identifying drivers whose driving has been impaired due to the use of drugs. Almost half of the drug-impaired driving suspects were apprehended after involvement in a minor crash.

Objectives:
To examine the relationship between the signs observed by Police, relevant on-road events and the drug use of drivers as determined by subsequent blood analysis, and to compare this to the type and quantities of drug found in driver fatalities.

Methods:
Comparison of Roadside and Standardised Impairment Assessment observations and of the analytical results from the blood samples taken from drivers who had been apprehended after minor crashes with those who had not crashed before apprehension will be made. Toxicological results from driver fatalities will also be compared with these two groups of apprehended drivers.

Results:
Results from the first 12 months of operation of the new procedures will be described.

Discussion:
Differences in the type and quantity of drugs found in the two groups of impaired drivers (crash-involved and non-crash-involved) and in drivers who had died as a result of a crash will be identified and discussed. The elements of the Victoria Police Impairment Assessment procedures that have proved to be most consistently associated with the identification of drug impairment will be described.

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