

Human Performance Enhancement

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No 10 scientist urges brain pills for all

The Government's chief scientific advisor has requested that restrictions on the use of drug based cognitive performance enhancement be reviewed. The drugs in question were first developed for their disease treatment properties but are now found to enhance cognitive performance in the healthy.

Ritalin was once used solely for ADHD but is now used by undiagnosed people to enhance concentration e.g. before exams. Modafinil enhances clear thinking when tired. Donepezil enhances memory, concentration and ability to learn.

The safety assessment of these drugs was made using healthy controls as well as diagnosed cases. However, safety assessments are always made to the specification required by the regulator and it is a regular occurrence that safe drugs are found to have disproportionately harmful side effects. The emergence of such effects may take many years and require large exposed populations.

Comment

The emergence of performance enhancement raises issues of equality/discrimination and if facilitated, encouraged or knowingly permitted by an employer (for the purpose of gain?) liability for adverse effects could be transmitted to the employer.

Adverse effects could include: fatigue, dependency, emotional variability, personality changes...