



Institute for Community Health

A collaboration of the Cambridge Health Alliance, Mount Auburn Hospital, and Partners Healthcare

2006 AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Emerging use of combination diet pills in Brazilian immigrants.

Pieter A. Cohen, MD; Carolyn Casey, BSc; Lise Fried, DSc, MS; Elisa Friedman, MS; Juliana Coelho and Karen Hacker, MD, MPH.

Physicians in Cambridge, Massachusetts noted an increasing use of a combination diet pill in their Brazilian patients in 2005. These diet pills vary in composition but usually include amphetamines, benzodiazepines, an antidepressant, a diuretic and levothyroxine. Preliminary data from focus groups and interviews found that use appeared to be common and that side effects resulted in emergency room visits and loss of employment. No published research was found on this pill; however, an FDA advisory in February, 2006 warned against its use. Given the serious implications of this drug, researchers conducted a cross-sectional survey of 400 Brazilian women ages 18 to 50 to determine the prevalence of use and correlations with other lifestyle elements. To obtain information about clinic and community populations, the anonymous survey was offered to all eligible women attending community health centers and attending Brazilian churches. Researchers hypothesized that use would be particularly high in women wanting to decrease post-partum weight gain and that these patients do not disclose use to their primary physicians. The survey also explored perceived side effects and details on how respondents obtained the pill. All women contacted, regardless of their participation in the study, were provided information on hazards of the diet pill. The use of these Brazilian diet pills poses several health risks including dependency, hyperthyroidism, and electrolyte abnormalities. Our presentation will provide survey results including prevalence of use and an analysis of differences between community and clinic-based settings. These data will be used to develop an appropriate health education intervention.