



The Effects of Benzodiazepines on Memory: A Science or Media Concern

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The written media are important for disseminating information about drugs. Unlike information relating to other fields of research, however, information about drugs has many different written sources (research and medical journals, rules and regulations, magazines and lay media, etc.). Benzodiazepines are the most-prescribed drugs worldwide because of their effects on anxiety and insomnia. However, in some circumstances they can be associated with amnesic episodes. Almost 20 years has elapsed between when these effects were discovered and when general practitioners and users were told about them. This presentation highlights the history and logic of the discovery of the amnesic effect of benzodiazepines, and how information about it was relayed in different media, from research journals to the medical and lay media. I demonstrate why physicians remained in the dark for such a long time, and how a beneficial effect became an undesirable effect, partly due to media coverage.

Elisabeth Bacon is a researcher at INSERM (Institut National de la Sante et de la Recherche Medicale; French National Institute for Health and Medical Research) in Strasbourg, France (unit 1114: Cognitive Neuropsychology and Psychopathology of Schizophrenia) and Professor at the University of Strasbourg in Psychiatry. She completed her Ph.D. at the University of Strasbourg in physical organic chemistry under the supervision of Jean Marie Lehn, Nobel Prize (1987). She also has a diploma in Pharmacy Science. She then completed a post doc in neurochemistry and then spent two years working on epistemology and the history of science. At INSERM, she has worked in experimental psychology on the effects of benzodiazepines on memory and metamemory. She presently works on memory and metacognition in Schizophrenia. Her work here focuses on the paradoxical preserved nature of metacognition in Schizophrenia. She is also interested in public understanding of science and the diffusion of scientific knowledge through public channels.