

IT'S ABOUT PAIN

XYLAZINE

A couple months ago, *It's About Pain* charted the journey from \$500/kg fentanyl in western Mexican ports, to \$1,000,000/kg fentanyl sold on the streets of New York City. I alluded to it being mixed with an animal tranquilizer, xylazine.

This week, both the *LA Times* and *NY Post* have carried articles about this substance, calling it “flesh eating” because it attacks muscles and skin.

Known on the streets as “Tranq” or the “Zombie Drug,” it is mixed with fentanyl and sold on the black market.

Although it is an analog of clonidine, xylazine is not licensed for human consumption, but is widely used in veterinary medicine as a muscle relaxer and anesthetic agent for horses and cows.

It has vasoconstrictive properties. This means it shrinks arteries, and the effect can be disastrous in terms of smaller arteries nourishing muscles and skin. The problem is further aggravated by the presence of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) caused by smoking cigarettes.

Three years ago, *It's About Pain* mentioned that, in a survey of 220 patients taking opioids for chronic pain, around 40% of patients would buy street drugs if their prescriptions were blocked by government edict or rationed supplies of opioids at the pharmacies.

Today, we are seeing such rationing at the pharmacies. Last month, for example, local Safeway stores were out of common doses of oxycodone, with no knowledge of when more would become available. Some pharmacies could not fill prescriptions for “new patients,” saving their supplies for repeating customers. Some patients called five or six pharmacies before finding stock. Others had to switch to alternate opioids or other doses, like 30 mg to be cut into thirds for a 10 mg dose.

Unfortunately, some patients have purchased fentanyl from street dealers, to get by until their next prescription could be filled.

While most drug addicts are fully aware that their street drug could be fatal fentanyl, most pain patients do not know that street hydrocodone or oxycodone is commonly mixed with fentanyl. Also, very few people—addicts or pain patients—know about xylazine’s dangers. If patients are reluctant to seek medical care, or have barriers to receiving care, or the ER has a six-hour waiting time, the results can be awful...and worse than sudden overdose death.