

Testimony  
on behalf of the  
Pennsylvania Medical Society  
before the  
Judiciary Committee  
of the  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
March 8, 1999

Ladies and Gentlemen:

My name is Dr. David Hawk, Chairman of the Pennsylvania Medical Society's Commission on Public Health, and I am here this morning as representative for the Society. The Pennsylvania Medical Society appreciates this opportunity to share our thoughts with the Judiciary Committee on legislation concerning the proper schedule for the drug Gamma Hydroxybutyrate or GHB.

At a hearing before the Department of Health's Drug, Device and Cosmetic Board on January 6, 1999, the State Attorney General requested that GHB be classified as a Schedule I controlled substance under the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act. The Attorney General's request was based on his understanding that the drug is one with high potential for abuse and with no currently accepted medical use and lacks accepted safety standards for use under medical supervision. The Society believes that there are potentially several medical uses for GHB currently under study. One proposed use is for the condition known as narcolepsy, a condition that results in a recurrent uncontrollable desire for sleep. Another proposed use is for the treatment of depression. GHB is being tested in combination with other central nervous system depressants for surgical anesthesia. Medical research will possibly uncover additional uses for GHB.

On the other hand, classifying GHB under Schedule IV, as House Bill 111 and House Bill 183 would do, gives wide and possibly uncontrollable latitude for the use of this drug by prescribing physicians. GHB is known as a "recreational drug". It is used for a variety of unproven and unsubstantiated problems such as weight reduction, mood enhancement, athletic performance enhancement, and increased sexual libido. Wide use in this fashion will also make GHB readily available and therefore readily available for abuse and misuse. Even more disturbing is the growing and ready availability of prescription drugs over the Internet with little more control than a valid credit card number. Do we really want GHB to be among the drugs available over the Internet?

A recent Internet search of GHB listings over the past five years reveals approximately 150 published articles on GHB and its uses. A number of potentially beneficial uses are mentioned. However, the large number of harmful uses and effects cannot and should not be ignored. Some articles discuss the development of physical and psychological dependence to GHB. GHB is known as the "Date Rape Drug", "Easy Lay", "Organic Quaalude", and "Grievous Bodily Harm", to mention a few of its street names. It has been associated with poisonings, blackouts, coma and death, especially when combined with alcohol. Its consequences when used incorrectly or for illegal purposes can be harmful and disastrous.

Seeing Schedule I as being too strict and Schedule IV as too liberal, the Pennsylvania Medical Society would recommend consideration of the designation of GHB as a Schedule II controlled substance.

The Society would also suggest legislation imposing penalties on illegal GHB manufacturers, distributors, sexual predators, and those who would divert the drug for other inappropriate purposes. It is very disturbing to find Internet sites listing the ingredients, the directions for the manufacturing of the drug, etc. Clearly, some restriction on dissemination of such information is needed.

In closing, the Pennsylvania Medical Society urges your consideration of classifying GHB in a way that will balance the legitimate need to restrict access to GHB while permitting the appropriate use of the drug for medical and research purposes.