

Date Rape Drugs Come to UPEI

By Sarah Murphy

Prince Edward Island cannot run nor hide from date rape drugs.

On March 17, a Brown's Court resident was victim of drink tampering. The victim, who asked to remain anonymous, was given a potentially deadly cocktail of drugs. The perpetrator was not identified, and the incident was not reported to the city police, but two of the victim's friends, Krista and Emilie, who were present that night have decided to speak out.

"Shannon* had only had a couple of drinks at Brown's Court, said Krista, the victim's friend, "but by the time we got to the Barn, she said she wasn't feeling right and she visibly appeared to be extremely intoxicated." The group of friends were at the Panther Lounge for approximately 15 minutes before the Campus Police on duty felt Shannon was too drunk and should be removed from the lounge.

Her friends knew something was wrong, said Krista. The group returned to Brown's Court and called an ambulance. "By that point, she was basically unconscious and was throwing up severely," she explained.

"We almost let her go home. She could have been lying in a snowbank by the time we came back [to Brown's Court], she could barely walk," said Emilie.

Shannon was taken to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) where Emergency Room personnel concluded that she had been victim of drink tampering. "She woke up the next morning and didn't remember the whole night," Krista said. "All she could remember was arriving at the Barn and after that everything was blank. She can't remember being in the ambulance,

or throwing up, or being at the hospital, or the doctors trying to get the IV in her, or anything."

The drug, either Rohypnol or GHB, is tasteless, odourless, and colourless and will therefore go undetected in one's drink. Although the drug is not as harmful and effective in non-alcoholic drinks, students are advised to watch their drinks carefully. "There is a fine line between getting high from the drug and dying," said Emilie.

Krista and Emilie were told that almost any chemistry major, or anyone who has some knowledge of chemistry can put the drug cocktail together — in certain instances a simple combination of over-the-counter medications. "What scares us is the dosage that was given was so high that obviously the person didn't know what they were doing, they were just popping these pills into people's drinks. She could easily have died," said Emilie.

Emergency Room doctors told Shannon that this was not the first incident. However, when David Sims, chair of the UPEI Sexual Harassment Committee, inquired into the QEH's records for the last six months, hospital officials said that they felt that this had been the only case.

Sims was unavailable for comment.

When contacted, the QEH Emergency room doctors on duty were unaware of the incident and did not feel comfortable discussing the diagnoses and effects of such a drug. The RCMP's crime lab or Poison Control were noted as possibly more reliable sources by the hospital's public relations office.

"Both Emilie and I have announced it to our classes and I can't get over the amount of people

who said 'Yeah, I think this has happened to me, [or] this has happened to my friend,'" said Krista.

With the help of the Sexual Harassment Committee, Krista and Emilie hope to raise awareness at UPEI.

The sexual harassment committee have been extremely helpful, said Krista. "David Sims has put a lot of time and research in finding out about this [drug], and they are very upset and very serious about [fighting drink tampering]." An information package will be given to every first year student in the fall.

Sims told Krista and Emilie that women are not the only victims of drink tampering; men can also fall victim to this potentially deadly prank.

Both students put information and awareness posters up in the women's and men's washroom

at the Barn, but most have been torn down. The two girls did not expect the posters to have much of an effect, but apparently patrons of the Panther Lounge were discussing the incident, they said. "That is what we want: we want people to be aware," said Emilie.

But for Shannon it is too late.

"The unfortunate thing is that our friend that this has happened to still isn't willing to drink when we are in public anymore. She won't even have a glass of pop because she is afraid that someone will tamper with it," said Emilie.

"This is something everybody has heard about, but you don't think it is going to happen here," said Krista.

*the name of the victim was changed to keep her anonymity.

