

Date rape drug suspected at McMaster

BY SARAH SCHMIDT

HAMILTON (CUP) The date rape drug Rohypnol is suspected to be at the root of several sexual assaults in the Hamilton area, including one at McMaster University.

Issuing a press statement January 30, the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police warned the community that they have identified a series of sexual assaults in the new year where Rohypnol is believed to have been used.

One of the three cases under investigation occurred at The Downstairs John, one of McMaster's undergraduate pubs.

"We're putting a full media blitz out," Staff Sergeant Paul Morrison of the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police said. "We're making it very well known."

Rohypnol comes in white or light-pink coloured pills and is 10 times more potent than Valium. It works almost immediately, producing the equivalent of an alcoholic blackout and is often accompanied by temporary paralysis. The drug is odourless, colourless and tasteless. When spiked in a drink, it is virtually undetectable and makes unsuspecting women easy prey, since they may black out and not remember the sexual assault.

Jeff Dockeray, manager of undergraduate pubs for McMaster's student union, says the news about the possibility of the date rape drug being used at a university pub is very disturbing.

"It's shocking to us. We have never come across such incidents," he said. Entry to McMaster undergraduate pubs is restricted to students with a valid university identification card and guests signed in by students.

Dockeray says he won't speculate on whether the McMaster case involved a student from the university.

"I would hope it's not running wild on this campus," he said.

As an awareness step, more posters about sexual assault, date rape and Rohypnol

went up last weekend at campus pubs to make sure the students are aware of the recent incident.

The McMaster University Sexual Assault Treatment Program has also advised the police that there are at least three more sexual assaults which occurred in downtown Hamilton in the last few weeks that have yet to be reported to the authorities.

Mary Keyes, assistant vice-president of student affairs, says the university has been informing students about the date rape drug, also known as the forget-me-pill or roofies, for two years now. But with the latest news, the university printed up more fact sheets and distributed them to all on-campus residents.

Rohypnol has been associated with a slew of sexual assaults in Texas, Florida and California, and its use in documented assault cases has been reported from Washington to Hong Kong.

In Canada, there are 20 cases under investigation in British Columbia possibly involving Rohypnol or similar drugs, with similar cases in a dozen other towns and Rohypnol has been in the shadows on other university campuses.

Last March, a University of Toronto student approached the campus police to report having experienced symptoms matching those induced by Rohypnol. She suspects a stranger who was making advances towards her at an off-campus bar may have slipped it in her drink.

This U of T account fell on the heels of the report of a McGill University student leaving a university pub after experiencing similar symptoms. Both women had made prior arrangements to meet up with friends and were brought home safely.

Neither woman was tested within the requisite 72 hours for evidence of the drug in their systems.

But just last November, a 21-year-old man who lives on the U of T campus in a

house owned by the university was charged with giving gamma hydroxy butyrate to a 14-year-old girl he allegedly tried to attack at a party.

Dubbed GHB or Liquid Ecstasy, it is another date rape drug and it hit the rave scene in Toronto over a year ago. While Rohypnol is abused by rapists for the temporary amnesia and paralysis effect it has on a victim, GHB is associated with creating a sense of intense intoxication and an enhancement of sexual interest.

The Canadian Federation of Students launched a nation-wide Rohypnol awareness campaign last year, while British Columbia's Women's Equality Minister announced a public awareness campaign last December in response to the growing number of stories of women being drugged at parties and bars and raped.

But the University of Toronto and Brock University campus police departments are the only two in the country with a Rohypnol awareness campaign in place.

Len Paris, U of T's safety coordinator, says more work needs to be done as a result of the McMaster revelation.

"I think we should turn the heat up on what we're doing," he said, adding that trained officers are available to conduct workshops on the subject.

Rohypnol is manufactured by Hoffman-La Roche and is marketed in 64 countries as a prescription drug. It is not for sale in Canada or the U.S., but is currently manufactured in Mexico, Europe, Asia and South America. It can, however, be brought into the country if prescribed by a foreign physician.

The company has recently reformulated the drug causing it to turn blue in a light-coloured drink as well as form small chunky pieces. But it will take some time for the new product to reach the markets through which it is brought into Canada.

The forth great garden of the gulf juried show

BY BILL MATTHEWS

The fourth Great Garden of the Gulf gallery event began in 1994 as a much needed vehicle for Island Artists. Unlike the rest of Canada, Prince Edward Island has no official provincial art gallery.

Hosted by the Confederation Center Art Gallery and Museum, this year's show was a little different from those previous, as it consisted of three jurors rather than one. Kathy Hooper and John Hooper of New Brunswick joined Erica Rutherford of PEI on the jury.

The response to the call for submissions was fairly large, with 155 pieces submitted by 94 artists. With this high number, it is obvious that there needs to be a more permanent venue for these works.

The submissions reflected the wide range of styles that the Island can inspire, ranging from traditional watercolours to mixed mediums of every description.

Some works of note include Tammy Peters's "Periods & Commas" -- a very nice mixed medium featuring a strong use of contrasting colour. Doreen Foster's "The wisdom of the Ages" is a powerful and intricate watercolour. Brian Collins had two highly stylized and spotaneous drawings at the show: "Me and You" and "Inbetweens" which used various mediums including watercolor, graphite and pencil crayon.

The organizers hope that this show will generate a greater interest in the problems that the Artistic Community on Prince Edward Island face without a proper facility in which to display their work.

There will be a People's Choice Award where patrons can vote for their favourite work. The show runs through February 12.

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