

Drug turns patients into gambling addicts

September 18 2006

Scottish researchers have found that drugs used to treat Parkinson's disease appear to turn some patients into gambling addicts.

A survey of patients in western Scotland found that about 10 percent of those taking dopamine agents had become problem gamblers, The Scotsman reported. A research team from Southern General Hospital in Glasgow tracked 251 Parkinson's patients who were taking different drug combinations.

Many of the patients who became addicted were already regular bettors before they went on Parkinson's medication. But the increase was often dramatic, like the patient who went from spending 10 pounds a week gambling to 1,500 pounds a week.

Parkinson's patients appear to suffer from low levels of dopamine. Dopamine plays a role in addiction by helping the brain to recognize sources of pleasure.

Robert Brown, a Glasgow psychologist, said that what patients using dopamine are likely to turn to depends on what they have access to.

"There is a tradition of gambling across the whole of Scotland, with more gamblers per head of population than in England and Wales," Brown said. "But people on these drugs could equally turn to alcohol or other ways of finding arousal or escape."

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Citation: Drug turns patients into gambling addicts (2006, September 18) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2006-09-drug-patients-gambling-addicts.html>

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