

# MEDIA RELEASE



HMRI @ the University of Newcastle

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## Leading toxicologist warns against new drug of abuse

An internationally recognised toxicologist at the University of Newcastle has warned of the dangers of abusing the drug benzylpiperazine.

Professor Alison Jones said benzylpiperazine was a “new drug of abuse” which could have serious clinical effects - similar to those of ecstasy to which it is structurally related.

The finding appears in a paper co-authored by Professor Jones in this week’s edition of the prestigious international medical journal – *The Lancet*.

In the paper Professor Jones from the University of Newcastle and her toxicology colleagues, from Guy’s and St Thomas’ Hospital in London and St Georges’ Hospital London Drug Testing Laboratory, show for the first time the presence of a new drug of abuse – benzylpiperazine.

Professor Jones said while benzylpiperazine was prohibited in Australia, the drug was readily available in the United Kingdom.

“This drug is currently unrestricted in the UK. Its availability and detection in patients in the UK who have come to harm, raises significant issues of clinical problems and access,” said Professor Jones.

Now in Australia, Professor Jones has joined the University of Newcastle and the Hunter Medical Research Institute as Professor of Medicine and Clinical Toxicology. She is also a clinician at the Newcastle Mater Hospital and responsible for providing education and toxicology advice to clinicians.

Professor Jones comes to Newcastle from Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital in London, where she was formerly the Director of the National Poisons Information Service. She brings with her a wealth of experience in clinical medicine, teaching and research.

An internationally recognised researcher in the field of toxicology, Professor Jones has expertise in the clinical aspects of drugs of abuse, analgesic poisoning, antidote use and chemical toxicology.

Professor Jones intends to conduct research into drugs of abuse in the Hunter region, where use of the methamphetamine (ICE) is prevalent, and with colleagues more widely throughout Australia.

Established in 1998, the Hunter Medical Research Institute is a partnership between Hunter New England Health, the University of Newcastle and the community. As a research hub, it provides an environment for groundbreaking health and medical research.

**For interviews with Professor Alison Jones, contact Kate Reid, Media and PR at the University of Newcastle on 02 4921 5351 or 0438 745 098.**



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