

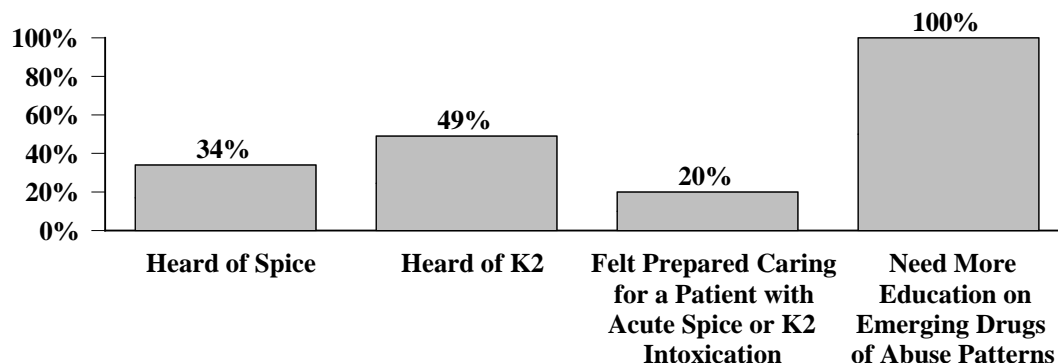
## A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

### *Only One-Fifth of Physicians in an Urban Emergency Department Felt Prepared to Treat Patients with Synthetic Marijuana Intoxication in 2010*

During a period of growth in the use of synthetic cannabinoids, emergency department physicians were unfamiliar and inexperienced with the nature and effects of the substances, according to a 2010 internet-based survey of emergency physicians at a large urban emergency department. Synthetic cannabinoid (SC) products, also known as Spice or K2, were first identified in the U.S. in December 2008 and there were an estimated 11,206 emergency department visits related to SC use in 2010. Despite the growing prevalence of SC use, less than half of the emergency physicians (EPs) surveyed in December 2010 had ever heard of Spice (34%) or K2 (49%), and only 20% felt they were prepared to take care of a patient with acute Spice or K2 intoxication (see figure below). Even those with some knowledge of SC had misconceptions about the nature of these drugs and their effects. For example, 25% were not aware that Spice or K2 were synthetic drugs and 47% said that they would not expect to see anxiety, sedation, or psychosis in a patient who had used SC—all potential symptoms of SC intoxication (data not shown). While EPs likely have more knowledge of SC now than they did at the time of the survey, the findings illustrate the difficulty physicians face when treating patients who are using any new drugs of abuse. The medical literature on the effects and complications of using novel drugs is typically limited, leaving physicians to rely on other sources of information, such as lay publications, the internet, patients, and colleagues. The authors suggest that “[w]ith the seemingly limitless designer drug compounds available for use and with no information on relative toxicity of each compound, [the] connection to toxicologists, poison centers, or other experts in emerging drugs of abuse will be crucial to EPs dealing with the constantly changing world of designer drugs” (p. 469).

**Emergency Department Physicians (EPs) Knowledge of Synthetic Cannabinoids, 2010**  
(N=71 EPs at a large urban emergency department)



NOTES: Data are from a self-administered, anonymous, voluntary, internet-based survey in December 2010 of resident and attending EPs at a large academic urban emergency department with an annual volume of approximately 85,000 visits. The study is limited by having a small sample size and being performed in a single study center.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from Lank, P.M., Pines, E., Mycyk, M.B., “Emergency Physicians’ Knowledge of Cannabinoid Designer Drugs,” *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine* 14(5):467-470, 2013. For more information, contact Dr. Patrick Lank at [patrick.lank@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.lank@gmail.com).