

Case of the Month
January 2008

A 17-year old male presents to the emergency department (ED) unresponsive after attending a party. He has no significant Past Medical History and is taking no medications. In the ED, his blood pressure is 110/70, pulse is 80, and his respiratory rate is 12. His pupils are midrange, and he has a nonfocal neuro exam. In an effort to protect his airway the ED doctor intubates the patient. Shortly after being intubated, he self extubates and demands to leave the ED.

The differential diagnosis of an unresponsive patient is vast. Of course, medical etiologies need to be considered. Drugs that can potentially cause a person to become unresponsive include: Ethanol, Sedative-hypnotics, Opioids, Antihistamines and insulin.

This is a “classic example” of Gammahydroxybuturate (GHB) toxicity. GHB was developed as a general anesthetic. In the 1980s it was used by body-builders for its ability to stimulate growth hormone release and to aid in muscle growth and fat reduction. Street names for GHB include; liquid ecstasy, liquid x, Georgia home boy, grievous bodily harm, zonked, easy lay etc. Kits to make GHB are easily found on the internet. It is also considered a date rape drug because it is easily miscible with alcohol to which it can be added without changing the color or taste. GHB can also be consumed in capsule and powder form. It is illegal to possess GHB unless it is under the direction of a physician. In the United States It is currently only approved for the treatment of narcolepsy. GHB is not detected on routine drug screens.