



An Atypical Internet-Mediated Nootropic Use Disorder Involving Kratom and Phenibut

Abstract

- The rise of nootropic use, known also as “**smart drugs**”, signifies a growing fascination with cognitive enhancement, fueling a diverse market of substances claiming to boost brain function.
- **Nootropics**, a heterogeneous class of compounds ranging from herbal supplements to synthetic drugs, lack standardized definitions or regulatory oversight. Enthusiasts are drawn by the promise of improved memory, focus, and mental acuity, although scientific evidence supporting these claims is often inconclusive or anecdotal.
- This lack of verification poses risks, with users experimenting with untested substances and uncertain dosages. **Online forums such as Reddit** further popularize these substances, fostering a booming industry amidst medical uncertainties, and for which limited scientific literature exists.
- This case demonstrates the misuse of **kratom** and **phenibut**. The aim of this case report is to highlight how online forums play into this landscape, and how awareness of these forums and online resources is essential to prevent the propagation of misinformation.

Case Report

A.B. is a 36-year-old female with a past medical history of anxiety disorder and alcohol use disorder in remission, presenting to the ED with altered mental status (AMS) and hallucinations.

Initial workup by the emergency department was largely negative, with urine drug screen being positive for cannabis.

She reported a 4-day history of derealization and thought broadcasting. The patient would have episodes of acute AMS with episodes of lucidity.

Patient was able to report regular use of Kratom for anxiety. One week ago she started taking phenibut, which she learned about online.

A.B. reported learning of phenibut as a treatment for social anxiety on Reddit and ordered it online. A.B. also used melatonin, diphenhydramine, and ephedrine

Discussed dangers of continued substance use, and how she was at elevated risk of addiction. Patient was discharged with outpatient follow-up.

Patient presented one week with AMS as well as hallucinations that caused her to jump downstairs. She was found to have clavicle and spine fractures.

Patient was admitted medically. A.B. reported continued use of phenibut and kratom. Presentation was determined to be secondary to delirium, which resolved

Patient presented several months later with recurrence of use of multiple substances. Patient was admitted and stabilized rapidly without intervention.

Patient was discharged with follow-up. A.B. completed outpatient dual-diagnosis psychiatric and is currently active with outpatient psychiatric, therapeutic, and social work care.

Discussion

This case report demonstrates how the rise of nootropic use reflects a complex interplay of societal pressures, individual aspirations, and persistent stigma, raising important questions about how our patients navigate this unknown and rapidly evolving landscape.

The anonymity of online forums provide an appealing alternative to the traditional mental health system, allowing for the rapid spread of anecdotal experiences and misinformation.

Despite limited scientific studies on the efficacy and safety of mood-altering substances like kratom and phenibut, these forums have presented them as miracle drugs for mental health issues and downplay risk of misuse.

Vulnerable individuals seeking relief from anxiety and stress have been influenced by the narratives shared on these platforms, resulting in users like A.B. putting their well-being at risk.

Healthcare professionals face an uphill climb combating misrepresentations and erroneous information promulgated on online forums. Education of the individual patient in clinical encounters and the public at community forums and online sites necessitates additional research and clinical awareness.

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Substance	Molecular Structure	Summary	Mechanism of Action
Phenibut		CNS depressant with anxiolytic and sedative effects	GABA-B receptor agonist (primary) GABA-A receptor agonist (lesser extent)
Kratom (Mitragynine)		Plant compound with opioid-like effects and stimulant properties	Partial agonist at μ-opioid receptors. Antagonist at κ- and δ-opioid receptors.