FATAL INTOXICATION WITH PENTOBARBITAL: A CASE REPORT.
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Introduction: Pentobarbital is a short-acting barbiturate that acts like a nonselective central nervous system depressant, primarily used as sedative hypnotic and also as an anticonvulsant in sub hypnotic doses. Severe intoxication produces coma and may lead to cardio respiratory arrest.

Case report: The authors present a fatal case with pentobarbital (Nembutal®) in a 35-year-old male, an airline crew member with several trips abroad, often to the extreme orient. He had undergone psychiatric treatment and had a history of previous suicide attempts. The victim was found dead lying on the bed in a hotel room where he used to stay, and near the body were found two uncapped empty 100 mL bottles of Nembutal®, a veterinarian preparation of sodium pentobarbital used as an anaesthetic, commercialized in Thailand, to where he had travelled two weeks before his death.

Materials and Methods: An HPLC/DAD/MSD with electrospray method was used to detect, confirm and quantify pentobarbital in post-mortem samples, after a solid-phase extraction procedure.

Results: The pentobarbital concentration found in post-mortem blood was 44.9 μg/ml, higher than the reported therapeutic concentration (1-10 μg/ml). A GC/MS analysis confirmed the presence of Pentobarbital and detected the presence of Paracetamol (3,0 μg/mL) and Sertraline (0,14 μg/mL). Ethanol and drugs of abuse results were negative.

Discussion and Conclusions: In fatal cases due to pentobarbital administration, the concentrations of this barbiturate in post-mortem blood samples range between 10-51 μg/mL (average 29 μg/mL). In this case, a concentration of 44.9 μg/mL of Pentobarbital was detected in post-mortem blood. Examination of all information suggested that death resulted from suicide due to pentobarbital administration. It is important to refer that, in Portugal, Pentobarbital utilization is restricted to hospital. Effectively, in this case, it was used a veterinarian preparation of Pentobarbital, acquired in Thailand.

Keywords: Pentobarbital, HPLC/DAD/MSD