Check for updates

REVIEW

Hypnotic drug risks of mortality, infection, depression, and cancer: but lack of benefit [version 1; peer review: 2 approved]

Daniel F. Kripke

University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA, 92037-2226, USA

V1 First published: 19 May 2016, 5:918
<https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8729.1>
Second version: 17 Mar 2017, 5:918
<https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8729.2>
Latest published: 12 Nov 2018, 5:918
<https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8729.3>

Abstract

This is a review of hypnotic drug risks and benefits, reassessing and updating advice presented to the Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (United States FDA). Almost every month, new information appears about the risks of hypnotics (sleeping pills). This review includes new information on the growing USA overdose epidemic, eight new epidemiologic studies of hypnotics' mortality not available for previous compilations, and new emphasis on risks of short-term hypnotic prescription. The most important risks of hypnotics include excess mortality, especially overdose deaths, quiet deaths at night, infections, cancer, depression and suicide, automobile crashes, falls, and other accidents, and hypnotic-withdrawal insomnia. The short-term use of one-two prescriptions is associated with greater risk per dose than long-term use. Hypnotics are usually prescribed without approved indication, most often with specific contraindications, but even when indicated, there is little or no benefit. The recommended doses objectively increase sleep little if at all, daytime performance is often made worse, not better, and the lack of general health benefits is commonly misrepresented in advertising. Treatments such as the cognitive behavioral treatment of insomnia and bright light treatment of circadian rhythm disorders might offer safer and more effective alternative approaches to insomnia.

Keywords

hypnotics and sedatives , mortality , cancer , infection , depression , insomnia , sleep

Open Peer Review

Approval Status

	1	2
version 3 (update) 12 Nov 2018	view	view
version 2 (update) 17 Mar 2017	view	view
version 1 19 May 2016	view	view

1. **Jerome M. Siegel**, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, USA

2. **Barbara A. Phillips**, University of Kentucky, Lexington, USA

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

Corresponding author: Daniel F. Kripke (DanKripke@gmail.com)

Competing interests: Since 1979 publication of hypnotics' epidemiology from the American Cancer Society CPSI study, the author has been a frequent critic of hypnotics risks and benefits, especially through his non-profit internet web site, www.DarkSideOfSleepingPills.com, that offers readers additional information and references about hypnotics. Dr. Kripke's family owns non-controlling stock and options in a large conglomerate that in turn invested a tiny percentage of its capital in Sanofi-Aventis and Johnson and Johnson stock. The author has advised the USA Food and Drug Administration to take certain actions regarding hypnotics (Petition available at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=FDA-2015-P-3959>), and related litigation may arise. The author has no relevant affiliations or financial involvement with any organization or entity with a financial interest in or financial conflict with the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript. This includes employment, consultancies, honoraria, other stock ownership or options, expert testimony, grants or patents received or pending or royalties. No writing assistance was utilized in the production of this manuscript.

Grant information: The author(s) declared that no grants were involved in supporting this work.

Copyright: © 2016 Kripke DF. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

How to cite this article: Kripke DF. **Hypnotic drug risks of mortality, infection, depression, and cancer: but lack of benefit [version 1; peer review: 2 approved]** F1000Research 2016, 5:918 <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8729.1>

First published: 19 May 2016, 5:918 <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8729.1>

Introduction

This is a reassessment of hypnotic drug risks and benefits, updating and expanding information presented October 26, 2015 to the Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (United States FDA) as part B of Petition FDA-2015-P-3959, accessible in April, 2016 at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=FDA-2015-P-3959> along with Comments responding to that Petition. Almost every month, new information about the risks of hypnotics (sleeping pills) appears. This review includes new information on the growing overdose epidemic, eight new epidemiologic studies of hypnotics' mortality risk not available for previous analyses, and new emphasis on risks of short-term hypnotic usage.

Risks of hypnotic drugs

Hypnotic drugs increase all-cause mortality

Use of hypnotic drugs is associated prospectively with a greatly increased risk of all-cause mortality. Some of this mortality has been documented as deaths caused by hypnotics by Medical Examiners, attributed to respiratory arrests resulting from "overdose." However, it is likely that many deaths from respiratory depression occur among patients never seen by coroners, especially when the death is caused by a combination of hypnotics with other contributing factors, so that the lethal hypnotic dosage may by itself have been within currently-customary dosage ranges. In addition to respiratory depression, hypnotics appear to be causally related to serious illnesses and premature deaths from cancer, serious infections, mood disorders, accidental injuries, suicides and homicides.

The overdose epidemic

Only a small fraction of U.S. deaths has been examined by coroners and Medical Examiners. Thus, it is commonly assumed that overdose deaths have been grossly under-reported. Despite such underestimation, U.S. drug and opioid overdose deaths reported in 2014 reached 47,055, a 137% increase since 2000¹. Likewise, U.S. use of hypnotics has dramatically increased over about the same interval². Available death certificate reports seem unclear, but perhaps one third of death certificates listing overdose with an opiate as a cause of death also lists a benzodiazepine, Z hypnotic, or barbiturate as a cause of death (retrieved from CDC Wonder). An opioid prescription is more likely to lead to overdose when a hypnotic is prescribed³. There have also been several thousand yearly reported overdoses involving a hypnotic in which an opiate was not involved. So great is the recent increase in overdose deaths that it has lowered overall life expectancy in much of the U.S. adult population^{4,5}. Overdoses kill more Americans than automobile accidents or murders. Aside from overdose deaths, benzodiazepines were involved in a comparably increasing number of emergency room visits over a similar time interval, and over half of these also involved opioids, alcohol, or all three in combination⁶. Combined overdoses of opiates and benzodiazepine agonists had more severe outcomes. A recent *JAMA Psychiatry* Viewpoint gave an even larger estimate of self-injury deaths often due to drug intoxication at 68,298 for 2013, and that did not include the role of suicidally-motivated dangerous driving⁷. Suicides from all causes per capita have been increasing, particularly among women, and particularly in recent years at about the time that generic zolpidem became available⁸. Hypnotics are a factor in more than half of intoxication and dangerous driving deaths⁹.

Forty epidemiologic studies

In 40 epidemiologic studies that provided comparable risk ratios for mortality associated with hypnotics, 39 showed that hypnotics were associated with excess mortality, as listed in the [Appendix](#). One exception was a small study by Merlo *et al.* that nevertheless found hypnotics associated with cancer deaths¹⁰. A partial exception was a study from Taiwan that found benzodiazepine hypnotics associated with significant excess mortality, but found zolpidem 10 mg associated with significantly reduced mortality in adjusted models, despite a significantly-increased unadjusted mortality risk for zolpidem and a significantly-increased adjusted risk of cancer mortality for zolpidem¹¹. In a comment to this report appearing with it on the internet, I have questioned the statistical methods of adjusting zolpidem risks¹¹.

Only this one of the 40 epidemiologic studies of hypnotic drugs reported any association with improved patient survival, and that only after questionable statistical adjustments¹¹. None of the other 39 studies found hypnotic drug risk ratios significantly less than 1.0. That is, in 39 studies there was no evidence that hypnotics ever benefit patient survival. To find 39 of 40 studies showing a positive risk ratio was very highly significant, $P < 0.000001$. Also, the evidence of association satisfied all nine Bradford Hill criteria for inferring causality¹², though skepticism despite meeting these criteria may be warranted¹³. There remain questions concerning the magnitude of the causality. The randomized placebo-controlled trials I have suggested would help clarify this causality magnitude¹².

Of the 40 epidemiologic studies, 31 individual studies reported statistically significant mortality odds ratios, risk ratios, or hazard ratios exceeding 1.0. All 18 studies reporting on samples of >14,000 people found significant mortality risks, but nine of 22 smaller studies found positive trends that were not significant. Most of the non-significant reports were among the earliest 15 published before 2006. Of studies analyzing follow-ups of 8 years or less, 22 of 26 studies reported a significant association, but of studies with longer follow-ups, only 10 of 14 studies observed significant mortality risks. This may suggest that during long prospective follow-ups, many patients initially taking hypnotics will discontinue hypnotic usage, whereas many controls not using hypnotics at prospective baseline may have begun using hypnotics during a long follow-up, so that the longer the follow-up, the more mixing of hypnotic-consuming and control groups becomes likely. Mixing weakens the risk-ratio contrasts observed. In long follow-ups, one is also studying the selected survivors of the more marked short-term risks that have been recently described^{14,15}.

Most of the 40 studies reported mortality risk ratios of less than 1.5, but some of the highest quality studies reported among the highest risk ratios. Four of the most recent studies were particularly persuasive, as presented below.

The Geisinger Health System study

From electronic records of the Geisinger Health System in Eastern Pennsylvania, a sample of 34,205 patients was drawn with carefully controlled 2:1 matching of hypnotic users with non-user controls for age, gender, smoking, and various comorbidities. Compared to a reference hazard ratio of 1.0 for non-users of hypnotics, the

fully-adjusted mortality hazard ratio for use of 0.4–18 hypnotic doses per year was 3.60 (2.92–4.44, 95% CI), for those using 18–132 doses per year, the hazard ratio was 4.43 (3.67–5.36), and for >132 doses per year, the hazard ratio was 5.32 (4.50–6.30)¹⁶. Each of these associations was significant with $P < 0.001$. Sensitivity studies showed that little of the hypnotic-associated mortality could be explained by known confounders or use of hypnotics before commencement of the study. In this sample, prescriptions for each of the following drugs were found to significantly predict increased mortality with statistical significance: zolpidem, temazepam, eszopiclone, zaleplon, triazolam, flurazepam or quazepam, and barbiturates prescribed to induce sleep. This review is principally concerned with these popular hypnotics for which drug-specific mortality data are available. Barbiturates prescribed at night for sleep considered as a group had about the same empirical hazard ratios as the benzodiazepines and zolpidem, but the observed hazard ratio for eszopiclone was significantly higher than that of barbiturates, possibly biased by the shorter average follow-up intervals for this more-recently introduced drug¹⁶.

The Weich *et al.* study

In a sample of over 100,000 hypnotic users and matched controls from the representative British General Practice Research Database¹⁷, users of 1–30 defined daily doses (DDD) of hypnotics and anxiolytics within a year had fully adjusted dose-responsive mortality hazard ratios of 2.55 (2.42–2.69, 95% CI) for 1–30 DDD (defined daily doses in the first year); 3.78 (3.54–4.04) for 31–60 DDD, 4.19 (3.84–4.58) for DDD 61–90, and 4.51 (4.22–4.82) for DDD >90. Extensive full adjustment for potential confounders resulted in only very small and inconsistent decreases in the estimated hazard ratios, and many methodological details were focused on minimizing possibilities of confounding. Use of benzodiazepine hypnotics only was associated with higher hazard ratios than use of “Z” hypnotics only. These hazard ratios were remarkably similar to those from the Geisinger Health System, considering the many differences in drug characteristics, samples, design, confounder controls, and analyses. Note that as in the Geisinger Health System study, much of the mortality was associated with early deaths after limited doses of hypnotics, perhaps as little as one-two prescriptions filled or refilled.

Norwegian Pharmacy Database

A recent representative study of the Norwegian Pharmacy Database found that benzodiazepine-receptor-agonist use was associated with a mortality odds ratio of 2.30 (2.20–2.40)¹⁸. The authors argued that terminal illness caused an upturn in benzodiazepine-receptor agonist use shortly before death (which might be appropriate for hospice care), and therefore they argued that the increased benzodiazepine-agonist use among those who would die was demonstrated as a confound of terminal illness. To the contrary, their data demonstrated an excess of benzodiazepine use even among those who would not die until 22 months or later, so the benzodiazepine use of this population was elevated before the terminal upturn in hypnotic usage that the authors had demonstrated. Also, the upturn in death-associated hypnotic use 6–10 months before subsequent death might be consistent with a causal lethal hazard resulting from only a few short months’ exposures to hypnotics. The Norwegian Pharmacy Database did not enable this study to

identify terminal illnesses, to analyze comorbidities or to control for other confounders.

The Palmaro *et al.* study

In this large study, both French and British case-control samples were drawn from reasonably-representative national samples¹⁴. Results had many similarities to those of Weich *et al.*¹⁷ despite numerous differences in statistical design. Substantially lower overall hazard ratios were found in the French sample (not all significant after adjustment), perhaps because a large number of occasional users were included. An important finding was the much higher hazard ratios associated with the initial 3–6 months of hypnotics-benzodiazepines use, as high as 11.12 (95% CI, 9.91–12.47) for the 3-month analysis of the British sample. This sharpened the evidence, also noted in the three previous studies discussed, that although dose-response is observed over several years, much of the hypnotic-associated hazard is observed during the early months of usage after as little as one or two prescriptions.

It should be noted that Weich *et al.*¹⁷ and Palmaro *et al.*¹⁴ found significant hazard ratios associated with diazepam and other benzodiazepines that are not considered hypnotics (though tranquilizer benzodiazepines may often be used for sleep). These more modern data with better drug identification and measurements of prescriptions during follow-up must be considered more reliable, but neither “Valium” nor “Librium” had been associated with excess mortality in the previous large U.S. CPSII study¹⁹. One might argue that if diazepam has a different hazard from temazepam, for example, this specificity tends to bolster the evidence for causality with temazepam. On the other hand, it would not be clear if the specificity is in the drug’s pharmaceutical effects, in its absorption and half-life, in its usual time of administration, in other aspects of frequency and dosage of administration, or in various associated confounders.

Note that these epidemiologic studies had many limitations¹². However, the limitations that would tend to bias the results towards underestimating the associations of hypnotics and mortality appeared more influential than those that would bias towards overestimation of the risks. In particular, studies with the most careful efforts to control for confounders found that such control made little difference in the estimated risk ratios, but the hazard ratios in these carefully-controlled studies tended to be higher. The risk ratios derived, like the studies themselves, were extremely heterogeneous, probably due to differences in the size, age, gender, and ethnicity of samples and their health status, the nature of the hypnotics studied, the accuracy with which the drugs involved and their dosages were known, the control variables available, and the duration of follow-up observations to ascertain mortality. Meta-analyses attempting to group 40 such heterogeneous studies would not be clarifying.

Short-term hypnotic use is unsafe

Data provided by Palmaro *et al.*¹⁴ and Chung *et al.*¹⁵ expanded the hints in the other large epidemiologic studies^{16–18} that short-term hypnotic usage has surprisingly high risks: apparently short-term hypnotic use has higher risks than long-term usage on a per dose or per-unit-time basis. It is logical that for a patient with an “overdose” of common contributory factors such as aging, obesity, sleep apnea,

alcohol overuse, and opiate use, even a single hypnotic dose could be lethal on the first night of consumption. Depending on the drug and the patient's metabolic capacity, the hypnotic drug concentration in blood could increase for the first few consecutive nights of dosage, but eventually, developing tolerance might make each dose less risky among those who had survived the initial doses. There would continue to be deaths at a lower rate after tolerance develops because of hypnotic dose-escalation in response to tolerance, addition of other sedatives or opiates, especially-heavy pre-sleep alcohol consumption, body position, altitude, upper respiratory infections, and other contributing factors that could suddenly produce hypnotic lethality even after several years of steady consumption. In addition, new consumption of non-sedative drugs that impair liver drug metabolism and even foods such as grapefruit can suddenly make a patient more vulnerable to a customary dose. Understanding these considerations, limitation of hypnotic prescribing to a small number of doses or a single prescription cannot be considered safe.

Are insomnia and depression explanatory confounders?

Several reports carefully examined insomnia and depression as potential confounders of the association of hypnotics with mortality, finding that insomnia and depression could explain little if any of this association^{17,20–22}. Note also that the evidence does not permit us to assume that causality between insomnia, depression, and hypnotic usage is one-way when contemplating confounder control, as there is reverse causality^{23,24}.

Summary of mortality risk epidemiology

Altogether, the epidemiologic literature is conclusive that hypnotic use is associated with excess mortality. The better studies tend to show very high dose-response risk ratios suggesting association with a very large number of deaths. A supplement to the Geisinger Health System data showed that the risk ratios demonstrated lead to estimated U.S. deaths associated with hypnotic usage of the same order of magnitude as those associated with cigarette use, around 300,000–500,000 per year¹⁶. Evidence has been presented from several independent studies that most of these deaths cannot be attributed to known forms of confounding, and indeed, adjustment for the major confounders such as smoking and comorbidities produced little change in the estimated associations in most of these studies. Authors acknowledge that their estimates of adjusted association of hypnotics and mortality could be influenced by inadequate ascertainment of confounding factors or lack of control for a very large number of potential confounds with small or rare effects. It is because skeptics may question whether the strong associations of hypnotics with mortality are causal, despite data fulfilling the Bradford Hill criteria for inferring causality¹³, that large post-marketing controlled trials of vulnerable patients may still be needed¹².

Hypnotic drugs have a long history of delayed recognition of mortality risks

Despite its well-known risks of lethality, pentobarbital was nevertheless for decades a preferred hypnotic routinely prescribed for patients seeking sleep aids. In the U.S. today, the most notable human application of pentobarbital is in implementing the death sentence. Although it has been believed that the more modern benzodiazepine and benzodiazepine-receptor-agonist hypnotics

that replaced barbiturates have higher acute margins of safety and therefore lower risks than pentobarbital, death certificate and epidemiologic data do not confirm that the newer drugs are significantly safer than barbiturates in routine use^{12,25}.

Hypnotics produce an excess of deaths at night

In the first Cancer Prevention Study, the percentage of deaths at night were found to be increased by 15.6% among those taking hypnotics ($P=0.01$), presumably due to respiratory suppression²⁶. In that study, the higher percentage of excess deaths at night associated with taking hypnotics accounted for about one third of total excess mortality associated with hypnotics. These nocturnal deaths were attributed to other causes, even though quiet respiratory suppression as a cause would explain the higher percentage of nocturnal deaths observed among those taking hypnotics than among controls.

The mechanisms of dangerous hypnotic respiratory depression are well-understood. The common hypnotics including barbiturates, benzodiazepines, the “Z” drugs and other benzodiazepine-receptor agonists bind to gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) receptors. These ligands-agonists alter the configuration of the receptors to allow negative chloride ions to more readily enter the neurons, where the chloride negatively hyperpolarizes the membranes and inhibits the neurons from firing. When they depress neural respiratory center firing, such drugs can acutely suppress respiration and in large enough dosage, or when individuals are particularly sensitive, may effectively arrest respiration, which leads rapidly to cardiac arrest and consequent death^{25,27,28}. Respiratory depression is accordingly, and accurately, listed among zolpidem's warnings and precautions²⁹. The barbiturates and alcohol bind to different locations on GABA receptors, where they exert additive or perhaps synergistic respiratory depression effects which may add to benzodiazepine-agonist effects. An antihistamine, diphenhydramine, also binds to GABA_A receptors, but it does not seem known whether the actions of diphenhydramine on GABA receptors are similar to benzodiazepines. Opiates bind to mu (μ) opioid receptors on respiratory neurons, where they hyperpolarize neural membranes by opening potassium channels³⁰. Thus opiates, benzodiazepine agonists, and alcohol have additive or synergistic effects inhibiting respiratory neurons.

Hypnotics can cause serious and potentially lethal infections

A meta-analysis of available placebo-controlled randomized clinical trials showed that hypnotics cause infections ($p<0.00001$)³¹. Because these clinical trials randomized hypnotics versus placebos, the 44% higher infection rate among participants who were given hypnotics was proven to be caused by the hypnotics. Moreover, the lead manufacturer of zolpidem has acknowledged that zolpidem induces infections, based on that manufacturer's own clinical trials data³². The FDA also found dozens of reports of zolpidem-related severe infections among post-marketing reports²⁹.

Extensive epidemiologic data demonstrated that hypnotics are associated with increased pneumonia including fatal pneumonia³³. This finding was not confirmed by one Taiwanese study³⁴, but another Taiwanese study focusing on patients with sleep disturbances found that use of zolpidem was associated with 62%–91%

increased hospitalizations for serious infections³⁵. A Taiwan study of patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease found highly significant odds ratios associated with benzodiazepine use of 9.3 for pneumonia, 10.4 for acute chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) exacerbation, 45.0 for acute respiratory failure, and 18.6 for cardiopulmonary arrest; whereas the odds ratios for “Z” drugs such as zolpidem were of almost similar magnitude³. In confirmation, note in the Geisinger Health Study supplement, Table 7¹⁶, mortality hazard ratios were likewise specifically elevated among hypnotics users with COPD. Another Taiwanese study observed that use of zolpidem was associated with increased risk of pyogenic liver abscess³⁶. British data showed that use of benzodiazepines and use of the hypnotic zopiclone (containing 50% eszopiclone as the active ingredient) were significantly related to asthma exacerbation and to all-cause mortality following exacerbation³⁷. This asthma study described some of the benzodiazepine-agonist-mediated impairments of immune surveillance³⁷. Perhaps as a consequence of post-hospital continuation of benzodiazepines and resultant infection, use of benzodiazepines was associated with 23% increased hospital readmission in North Carolina³⁸. In summary, epidemiologic evidence indicates that hypnotics not only cause the mild upper-respiratory infections most commonly reported in available controlled clinical trials³¹, but also more severe and life-threatening infections. Since such infections demonstrably impair survival, infection is shown to be an additional mechanism by which hypnotics covertly increase mortality. The death certificate would be likely to list the infection as a cause of death but not the hypnotic which may have caused that infection.

Animal studies confirm that hypnotics can cause infections. A controlled trial demonstrated in mice that diazepam exacerbated *Streptococcus pneumoniae* infection through GABA_A receptors, partly explaining the underlying immune mechanisms³⁹. In mice, diazepam also exacerbated cowpox, a viral infection⁴⁰. Midazolam impaired equine immune responses, attributable to effects on macrophage peripheral benzodiazepine receptors (now called TSPO)⁴¹. Evidence for involvement of the peripheral benzodiazepine receptor TSPO in immune impairment also came from specific test compounds in mice⁴². Thus, hypnotic drugs cause increased risk of potentially lethal infections in controlled laboratory experiments.

Hypnotics are associated with increased cancer **Human clinical trials strongly suggested that hypnotics cause cancer**

A compilation of randomized controlled trials of hypnotics showed 12 cancers or tumors of uncertain malignancy reported among participants randomized to a hypnotic, but none (zero) among those randomized to placebo ($P=0.032$, two-tailed Fisher Exact Test)⁴³. When the FDA repeated this audit of their controlled trials data, they counted 13 cancers among those randomized to hypnotics versus none (zero) from placebo⁴³.

The controlled-trials compilations described above did not include indiplon, an unlicensed zaleplon-like benzodiazepine agonist and hypnotic, for which studies published subsequently indicated three incident cancers in the indiplon groups and none in the randomized control groups^{44,45}. The compilations did include cancers associated with the marketed hypnotic ramelteon that admittedly has a

very different molecular mode of action from the benzodiazepine agonists.

The FDA was not persuaded that these human controlled-trials data required regulatory action, because most of the definite cancers were only minor skin cancers, because of heterogeneities in the data, and because the cancers were recognized after such short randomization periods. Nevertheless, the controlled trials data suggested more than skin cancer. There were cancers of organs apart from skin noted among those treated with hypnotics but none among those randomized to placebo. Reconsideration of FDA’s deferral of action is now encouraged by new animal testing and new epidemiologic findings: over half of the research referenced in this manuscript appeared after that FDA deferral of action.

Because hypnotics seem to cause cancers to be suddenly recognized during short clinical trials, e.g., from one month to one year, the short-term effects are likely to arise more from hypnotics promoting progression of tiny pre-existing cancers rather than from effects upon microscopic cancer initiation. Such progression may cause a cancer death, whether or not the hypnotics initiated the cancer.

Animal studies proved that hypnotics cause cancer

The animal data in the FDA files for zolpidem indicated that increasing doses of zolpidem fed to rats resulted in increasing numbers of renal liposarcomas and lipomas combined (statistically significant). These data also showed increased thyroid follicular adenomas and carcinomas combined, and increased testicular interstitial cell adenomas, but the latter findings did not reach statistical significance⁴⁶. There were no such tumors – that is, zero tumors – in the placebo groups. These studies were too small, however, to have substantial power for these neoplasms. Expert FDA pharmacy examiners interpreted the data as suggesting an unknown degree of cancer risk for humans.

These experiments, which showed tumors resulting from feeding zolpidem to rats and suggested a dose-dependent relationship, apparently were never extended, clarified, published, or otherwise followed up.

Similarly, the animal data used for eszopiclone evaluation relied largely on old zopiclone data, since eszopiclone is roughly 50% of zopiclone, and eszopiclone is thought to be the active isomer. Along with other issues, the animal evidence that zopiclone caused animal cancers was of great enough concern to FDA’s scientists, that at least five FDA scientists and medical officers recommended against approval of eszopiclone⁴⁷. Tumors of the lung in rodents were of special concern; these findings also anticipated the human-specific association of hypnotics with lung and esophageal cancers, as will be described below. Eszopiclone was nevertheless approved as a hypnotic.

Since zolpidem and eszopiclone were evaluated, much additional evidence has appeared relating hypnotics to cancer. Amerio *et al.* systematically surveyed FDA records including much animal data not included in the earlier compilation of hypnotics trials and concluded that hypnotics and sedatives had among the most elevated cancer hazards among psychotropic drugs⁴⁸.

***In vitro* studies strongly suggest that hypnotics cause cancer**

Zopiclone, zaleplon, and ramelteon are clastogenic^{47,49,50}. These hypnotics damage chromosomes. Clastogens are potentially mutagenic agents that induce disruption or breakages of chromosomes. This process can lead to carcinogenesis. Cells that are not killed by the clastogenic effect may become transformed to cancer⁵¹. One of the several formulations of zolpidem was said from *in vitro* studies not to be clastogenic⁵². Other than the four drugs mentioned, no information has been located that other hypnotic drugs found to be associated with cancer have ever been adequately tested for clastogenicity.

Clastogenicity is only one mechanism by which hypnotics are likely to be carcinogenic, through either initiating cancers or promoting progression through additional mutations of cancer cells, or both. The alterations of immune surveillance produced by benzodiazepine agonists, discussed in relation to infection above, suggest additional mechanisms by which cancer initiation and progression might be facilitated or disinhibited⁵³. Hypnotic-initiated increases in infections and consequent inflammation is another potential carcinogenic mechanism. These animal-demonstrated and *in-vitro* mechanisms for carcinogenicity of hypnotics, that have been widely ignored, support evidence that hypnotics cause human cancer.

Human epidemiology studies demonstrate elevated cancer incidence associated with hypnotics

A 2008 paper⁴³ listed three prior epidemiologic studies reporting associations of hypnotics with cancer deaths^{10,54,55}. Analysis of CPSII data found that the elevation in deaths associated with hypnotics was comparable to that associated with cigarettes⁵⁵, though not entirely due to cancer. The report of Merlo *et al.* was unique in that the small study showed significantly increased cancer deaths among hypnotic users, but the increase in overall deaths associated with hypnotics was not significant¹⁰. Mallon, Broman, and Hetta found a much higher cancer adjusted hazard ratio for habitual sleeping pill use of 5.3 (95% C.I. 1.8–15.4) than for smoking among males; none of the specific causes of death were individually significant among females⁵⁴. A similar result was shown in a later paper for males, but the simple significant mortality elevation of regular hypnotic use among females was lost after multivariate adjustment in the second study²¹. More recently, a number of new studies have appeared reporting that hypnotic usage is related to cancer incidence and mortality. Hartz and Ross found a significant association of hypnotic use with melanoma and close-to-significant associations for lung and breast cancers⁵⁶. Kao *et al.* found a remarkable 6.24 (4.13–9.43, 95% CI) hazard ratio for cancer incidence among those using at least 300 mg of zolpidem per year without other-benzodiazepine consumption (this would correspond to slightly more than one 5 mg dose per week)⁵⁷. In this Taiwanese national study, smoking and body mass index (BMI) were not controlled, but the overall cancer hazard ratios for zolpidem users were almost identical among men and women, despite an almost 11-fold greater prevalence of smoking among adult men compared to Taiwanese women at the time⁵⁸. BMI was not controlled, but at that time in Taiwan, although being overweight was more common among women, obesity was more common among men⁵⁹. In a complementary study of benzodiazepines in Taiwan, benzodiazepines were associated with a 1.19 (1.08–1.32 95% CI)

cancer incidence hazard ratio, with over twice the benzodiazepine-associated hazard among men as among women⁶⁰. Similarly, a brief analysis of the national data from Taiwan found a significant cancer adjusted odds ratio for two of three benzodiazepine hypnotics⁶¹.

In the Geisinger Health study using electronic medical records, Kripke *et al.* found a hazard ratio for cancer incidence of 1.35 (1.18–1.55 95% CI) associated with use of >132 hypnotic doses per year, with specific hazard ratios of 1.28 (1.03–1.59) for high-dose zolpidem and 1.99 (1.57–2.52) for high-dose temazepam¹⁶. There was a significant dose-response. This study was carefully controlled for age, gender, smoking, BMI, and by matching comorbidities among cases and controls. Jiao *et al.* found no excess of colorectal cancer among those reporting sleeping pill usage <3 times per week versus ≥3 times per week in the Women's Health Initiative data set⁶², a result consistent with the Hartz and Ross report on the same data set⁵⁶, but since the contrast of frequencies of usage was weak and the type and quantity of hypnotic consumption were not determined objectively, the negative observation was not very persuasive. We would not expect hypnotics to promote all cancers equally. Indeed, selective specificity among cancer types would be anticipated if the mechanisms are causal. Pottegard *et al.* and Sivertsen *et al.* found small but significant associations of hypnotic usage with cancer, especially lung cancer^{63,64}, but since they had not controlled for cigarette smoking, both groups thought their result might have arisen from confounding, albeit confounding was not conclusively demonstrated⁶⁵. That investigators failed to control for important confounders is not proof that confounding explains the significant hazard. Several U.S. and European groups^{63,64} and also Kao *et al.*⁵⁷ found high hazard ratios for lung and esophageal tumors, and the two San Diego studies had carefully controlled for smoking^{16,55}. We had proposed that effects of hypnotics on weakening the gastro-esophageal sphincter and permitting more gastro-esophageal regurgitation⁶⁶ might account for the high cancer-specific rates of esophageal and lung tumors¹⁶. These multiple studies finding hypnotics associated with human lung cancer were consistent with concerns of FDA scientists about lung cancers found in animal studies of zopiclone. The lung cancer specificity supports causality.

There was one pair of studies that was neither clearly confirmatory nor negative. A large-scale survey screening many drugs with a questionable scheme for reusing controls for multiple tests and incorporating a questionable 2-year drug-to-cancer lag remarked no significant association of cancer with temazepam or zolpidem but did find significant associations with oxazepam and perhaps lorazepam, using $P < 0.01$ and relative risk >1.50 as criteria⁶⁷. In that study, it was not always possible to control for smoking, and control for other confounders was crude and not well-standardized. A similar study added a possible association for phenobarbital⁶⁸.

To summarize the cancer epidemiology, the great majority of relevant studies have noted either small or large hazards for new cancers associated with hypnotics. Epidemiologic studies of hypnotics and cancer incidence have had many limitations, and some of these studies were not well-controlled for important confounders such as smoking and obesity, but the preponderance of evidence suggested a causal elevation of cancer incidence among those who take hypnotics.

The available clastogenicity data, animal data, randomized placebo-controlled clinical trials, and human epidemiology studies consistently, if not always conclusively, suggested that hypnotics likely cause human cancers and cancer deaths.

Hypnotics increase incidence of clinical depression

In combined clinical trials, participants randomized to hypnotics suffered 2.1 times as many incident (new) depressions as those randomized to placebo ($P < 0.002$)²³. These were not exacerbations of pre-existing depressions. These were depressions caused by the hypnotics. There are other data demonstrating worsening of depression with a wider variety of popular benzodiazepine and GABA agonists⁹. Treatment of insomnia by hypnotics causing comorbid depression stands in marked contrast to cognitive-behavioral treatment of insomnia, that has been shown to decrease comorbid depression⁶⁹.

Some studies have appeared designed to show that a hypnotic reduced depression scores among patients given an antidepressant known to cause insomnia^{70,71}. In the first of these studies, the benefit of the hypnotic for depression was not significant at week 4 after the investigators removed the rating scale items related to insomnia, whereas the week 8 benefit was only significant at the $P = 0.04$ level not correcting for multiple comparisons. In other words, using rigorous Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, the alleged benefit of hypnotic for depression symptoms was not significant. In the second study the authors more readily conceded that the hypnotic had no significant benefit for depression. These studies failed to rebut the evidence that hypnotics cause new depressions.

Depression is the major cause of suicide. Panic attacks are another risk factor for suicide⁹. Short-acting benzodiazepine agonists such as triazolam and zolpidem may cause withdrawal anxiety and even panic attacks during the daytime⁷². Suicide has been recently described as the 8th or 10th leading cause of death in the United States^{7,73}. Hypnotic use is associated with high rates of suicide^{25,55,74}. Indeed, comprehensive toxicological studies have found intoxicating abusable substances (mainly sedative-hypnotics) in a majority of suicides, often combined with alcohol in 30–40%⁹. Suicides due to overdoses have increased dramatically from 1999 to 2010 in the U.S.⁷⁵, but there have been an even larger number of deaths of undetermined manner in which suicide through overdose must be suspected⁷⁶. A very recent report estimated that in 2013 there were 7,000 overdose deaths related to anxiety and sleep medications⁷³, but this did not include all suicides in which the most rigorous toxicology shows a sedative or anxiolytic often mixed with alcohol to be present⁹. The adjusted odds rate for suicide was 4.2 among hypnotic users as compared to nonusers in one study of elderly people, whereas the odds were not elevated among anti-depressant users (tending to exclude depression and other comorbidities as confounders⁷⁷.) Prescription sleeping pill use was a stronger predictor of suicide attempts than insomnia symptoms in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication⁷⁸. In a large study from Taiwan, the adjusted suicide hazard ratio for “needing sleeping pills” was 11.1, whereas the hazard ratio for those reporting sleeping only 0–4 hours adjusted for sleeping pill use was only 3.5, and none of the hazard ratios for insomnia symptoms exceeded 2.0⁷⁹. Another national Taiwan study found increased suicides and attempts associated with zolpidem⁷⁴. The findings indicate that the association of suicides with hypnotic use cannot be entirely attributed to

confounders with reverse causality, since the association of hypnotic usage with depression is known to be largely caused by the hypnotics²³.

Zolpidem specifically has been implicated as a causal agent in a number of suicides, some of which involved kinds of dissociative behavior often attributed to zolpidem or to combined use of zolpidem with other drugs or alcohol⁸⁰. Impairments of cognition and judgment that may be caused by sleeping pills⁸¹ as well as hallucinations⁸², irrational behaviors^{75,83–85}, and behavioral disinhibition⁹ may all contribute to suicides, violence, and accidents, even among people who are not severely depressed.

Automobile crashes, falls, and other accidents are associated with hypnotics

Hypnotic drugs impair next-day alertness, motor skills, reasoning, and overall performance. Accidents of all sorts are associated with use of benzodiazepines and benzodiazepine agonists such as zolpidem^{86–88}. Most hypnotics impair automobile driving, as indicated by on-the-road controlled performance testing⁸⁹. This impairment in some instances exceeds the impairment produced by a blood alcohol concentration of 0.05%⁹⁰. Drivers’ ability to predict their own impairment is poor⁹¹. The use of hypnotics and other sedatives is strongly associated with on-the-road driver-at-fault crashes^{92–96}. In addition to accidents attributable to impaired coordination, impaired motor skills and loss of alertness, hypnotics may also lead to fatal crashes due to drug induced suicidal thinking, impaired judgment, or recklessness on the part of intoxicated drivers⁷. Some of these crashes result in deaths of passengers and other-vehicle occupants not themselves using hypnotics, but the other-vehicle deaths are not attributed to the hypnotics on death certificates.

One study showed that use of benzodiazepines and “Z” hypnotics was increased among victims of homicide as well as among the homicide perpetrators⁹⁷. Thus, both through bad driving and homicides, hypnotics result in deaths that have not been accounted directly as deaths from these hypnotic drugs.

It is well known that falls and accidental injuries are strongly associated with hypnotic usage, in particular hip fractures among aging patients^{98–106}. Hip fracture is a sometimes-lethal injury. The preponderance of studies indicates a true association of the use of hypnotics and falls, that is thought to be due to the properties of benzodiazepine agonists in inhibiting psychomotor skills and in causing weakness, slowed reflexes, and impaired judgment, especially less than 8 hours after ingestion. After taking a hypnotic at bedtime, older people may get up during the night, e.g., to visit the bathroom, when the pharmacologic impairment from a hypnotic is near-maximum and is combined with impairments from sleepiness.

A nursing-home study challenged these conclusions, arguing that it was insomnia, not hypnotics, that was associated with falls. This study did not appear to control for confounding sleep apnea, Alzheimer’s disease, or cognitive-behavioral disorders¹⁰⁷. It should be conceded that confounders are likely have some influence on risk ratios associating hypnotics with accidental injuries, but the scientific consensus suggests that the association is nevertheless partly causal, based in part on controlled trials showing hypnotic

impairments of driving and other forms of psychomotor performance. A causal element is inferred by the majority of authorities.

Safe doses of hypnotics for target populations are unknown

Animal studies indicate that some individuals in an animal research sample may succumb to a lethal hypnotic-drug effect at doses as low as one-fifth that which is universally lethal¹⁰⁸. Variations in susceptibility in a human population varying in age, gender, genetics, and health status is likely to be greater than that in a sample of laboratory animals. The minimum lethal dose of hypnotic drugs in humans is unknown, that is, the dose that might produce fatal respiratory arrest in one person out of 1000 in a representative population or one in 10,000. So many billions of hypnotic doses are prescribed yearly in the U.S. that one death per 10,000 doses would yield over 100,000 deaths per year. Moreover, there are no human dose-response data and very little animal data concerning what doses of hypnotics may be lethal in the presence of opiates, other sedatives, alcohol, aging, obesity, COPD, and other comorbidities. Yet most recognized hypnotic-related deaths are observed in the presence of such additional factors. More study is needed to establish safe doses of hypnotics (if any) when taken with other medications and in the presence of potential comorbidities. As for aging, the consensus of the American Geriatrics Society is that hypnotics should not be given to elderly patients in any dose¹⁰⁹.

Contributory factors combined with hypnotics could cause covert deaths

There is a vast discrepancy between the hundreds of thousands of yearly hypnotic-associated deaths implied by the high epidemiologic hazard ratios and the mere thousands of yearly death certificates in which a hypnotic is listed among the causes of death. Below are presented some of the possible explanations for this discrepancy.

Obesity and aging exacerbate hypnotic risks

Obesity and aging are perhaps the two most important risk factors for sleep apneas, that is, brief cessations of breathing during sleep¹¹⁰. Sleep apneas occurs at least a few times per hour in the majority of adults over age 40 years and in a great majority of those over age 65^{110,111}. If the duration of a sleep apnea before arousal becomes excessively prolonged, e.g., by a hypnotic, death could result. Even apart from apneas caused by obesity, mechanical problems produced by obesity may impair ventilation. Thus, hypnotic-related hazard ratios are higher among obese patients (see Geisinger Health study supplement Tables 2 and 7¹⁶.) Since there is no evidence that the huge increase in hypnotic hazards among obese patients can be attributed overdoses alone, it appears that obesity predisposes to covert hypnotic-related deaths, probably by prolonging apneas. The contributing role of combining hypnotics with opiates, other sedatives, and alcohol has already been discussed and is further discussed below. It is plausible that among susceptible patients, combinations of aging, obesity, sleep apnea, hypnotics, opiates, other sedatives, and alcohol could produce quiet respiratory cessations followed by cardiac cessation and death even without any ingested doses above common medical practice being taken. In effect, the "overdose" comes from the overdose of contributory factors along with a hypnotic, not from an excessive dosage of a

hypnotic considered by itself. Recall that the American Geriatrics Society does not approve of administering hypnotics to elderly patients in any dose¹⁰⁹, though a substantial portion of all hypnotic prescriptions go to elderly patients.

Prescription and non-prescription opiate use increase hypnotic risks

The use of opiates has become increasingly common in recent years¹¹². Opiates are respiratory suppressants that (like pentobarbital) in overdose can produce respiratory arrest and cardiac arrest. Among patients taking both benzodiazepines and opiates, a remarkable 75% were found to have sleep apnea, and causality was suggested by significant dose-response correlations both for the opiates and for the benzodiazepines¹¹³. In some patients, this combination of benzodiazepine and opiate causes hypoxemia (low oxygen)¹¹⁴. Our sleep clinic has recorded polysomnographic data from patients who suffered profound almost continuous apnea with severe hypoxemia due to combinations of hypnotics and opiates. Recall that it is understood on a molecular level how benzodiazepine agonists and opiates combine to suppress firing of respiratory neurons that are necessary to breathe. Patients receiving a combination of benzodiazepines and opiates have increased mortality¹¹⁵⁻¹¹⁷. The combination of opiates and benzodiazepines has caused a growing overdose problem in emergency rooms¹¹². Moreover, the most serious overdose problems are seen when opiates and benzodiazepines are combined with alcohol in older patients, reflecting combined effects of opiate, benzodiazepine, alcohol, and aging^{6,117}.

It may be relevant that close to 70% of hospice patients were taking an opiate and an anxiolytic or hypnotic in the last week of life¹¹⁸. This is not evidence by itself whether this combination influences the survival of hospice patients, nor is the author commenting on the ethics of combining such drugs in a genuine hospice situation. However, most patients given hypnotics and opiates have not consented to hospice management.

Quiet deaths from hypnotics with contributory factors go undetected by medical examiners

In many combined-sedative deaths, the individual drug concentrations present in blood may appear within customary therapeutic ranges. Even if a patient is undergoing cardio-respiratory monitoring at the time when respiratory cessation followed by cardiac cessation occurs, there is usually no way of determining whether the fatal respiratory cessation was due to hypnotic drugs in combination with various contributory factors. Especially when death occurs quietly at night (for example, death of an elderly obese patient known to have various comorbidities,) there usually is no autopsy. Physicians signing the death certificates may be tempted to list a cardiac event or a stroke or some long-standing comorbidity as the cause of death without recognizing when hypnotic-induced respiratory suppression was the precipitant.

The press described a highly distinguished example of how the cause-of-death is often declared after U.S. Supreme Court Justice Scalia died unexpectedly at night. According to numerous news reports and sheriff's documents, Justice Scalia's appearance was that of a person who had peacefully stopped breathing at night. There was no sign of agitation due to cardiac pain, nor had Justice

Scalia complained of cardiac symptoms before going to bed. Justice Scalia might have been taking hypnotics and opiates for the jet lag and pain he was known to be suffering when he arrived at a hunting lodge that routinely gives each guest a free bottle of wine. By the bedside, his CPAP machine for control of sleep apnea was not connected, perhaps because he was too excessively sedated to connect his CPAP device or because of problems related to the 4400 feet altitude. Without ever viewing the deceased or his bedroom, much less determining what hypnotics, opiates for pain, and alcohol Justice Scalia had consumed, a local official was encouraged by Justice Scalia's physician (thousands of miles away) to declare heart attack as the cause of death. Without an autopsy, we will never know if this death was precipitated by hypnotics or opiates and alcohol or if there was a heart attack. Even if a physician suspects that a hypnotic had a role, the physician has little motivation to list the hypnotic as a cause of death when it would be hard to prove and may reflect negatively on the physician prescribing that hypnotic.

Along the same lines, when hypnotics cause infection, cancer, depression, falls or other accidents, or murder, hypnotics are rarely listed among the causes of death. These patterns along with quiet respiratory deaths may explain why epidemiology shows much higher risks of death associated with hypnotics than the death certificates document. Nevertheless even the numbers documented in death certificates are much too high to be acceptable.

Commonly-prescribed hypnotics are used in unsafe combinations

Zolpidem, reportedly the most commonly-prescribed hypnotic in the U.S., with an estimated 40 million outpatient prescriptions in 2013¹¹⁹, ranked first for emergency department visits among psychotropic drugs according to CDC data^{119,120}. According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) data, 68% of zolpidem patients were sustained users (three or more prescriptions), and of those 22% were also sustained users of opioids¹¹⁹. Note that recent CDC guidelines recommend against use of benzodiazepine agonists with opiates¹²¹. Although the FDA had recommended that women use only 5 mg or 6.25 mg of zolpidem, only 5% of women and 10% of elderly were prescribed these low doses¹¹⁹. Moreover, 23% of patients with sustained use took another drug targeting the same receptors. A high percentage were depressed, as indicated by 34% of sustained zolpidem users also receiving antidepressants¹¹⁹. Recall also that the American Geriatrics Society recommended avoidance of any use of hypnotics for elderly patients¹⁰⁹, though many receiving hypnotics are elderly.

Hypnotics cause withdrawal insomnia, anxiety, panic, and epilepsy

It has been well known since they came into use over a century ago that hypnotics and similar sedatives are addicting drugs, frequently eliciting tolerance, physical dependence, and withdrawal reactions. Most of the benzodiazepine agonist hypnotics and even suvorexant are controlled like addicting drugs by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Withdrawal from benzodiazepine agonists can cause insomnia, anxiety, agitation, confusion, and

panic and even more severe somatic symptoms such as seizures and death in extreme cases^{24,72,121,122}. In addition, some of the short-acting sedatives such as triazolam and zolpidem may sometimes cause anxiety or agitation during the day following administration before the previous bedtime. Dr. Kripke has seen two patients taking triazolam who developed daytime panic attacks that remitted upon triazolam withdrawal and recurred upon re-challenge. There is also evidence that prolonged use of hypnotics may lead to lasting insomnia, as a consequence causing patients who withdrew from hypnotics to sleep worse than patients who had been randomized in parallel clinical trials to placebos²⁴. How long this withdrawal insomnia might persist has never been adequately defined.

In another example of sedative withdrawal leading to hyperexcitability, there is a report that benzodiazepine use and withdrawal may result in lasting increased epilepsy¹²³.

Relationship of hypnotics to insomnia, long sleep, and short sleep

A pioneering large epidemiological study by the American Cancer Society study conducted over 50 years ago showed an increased risk of death following hypnotic use. The Cancer Prevention Study I (CPSI) obtained questionnaires in 1958 from over 1,000,000 participants and reliably followed up their death or survival for 6 years¹²⁴. The data showed that both long and short sleep predicted elevated mortality (with 7 hours associated with minimal mortality for each age group). This study (often replicated) raised scientific doubt whether there is medical value to increasing reported sleep duration of an adult beyond 7 hours, though it also demonstrated that many adults reporting more than 7 hours of sleep were taking sleeping pills. Sleep durations below the population median are partly attributable to inherited traits, so whether there would be any health benefit in sedating people with short sleep durations to sleep longer remains to be demonstrated. A small objective study of sleep duration recorded by wrist activity suggested increased mortality above 390 minutes of actual sleep (which is greater than the current median sleep of American adults studied with similar technology¹²⁵.) In the CPSI data, self-reported insomnia had little or no additional mortality effect beyond hours of sleep, although insomnia was moderately associated with short sleep. In contrast, reported sleeping pill use was associated with about 50% increased mortality after controlling for age, gender, reported sleep duration, and reported insomnia¹²⁶. This was statistically a highly significant result in a million participants, but uncertainty about what participants meant by taking "sleeping pills" "Often" in terms of drug type and frequency demanded more study. The American Cancer Society performed a second Cancer Prevention Study (CPSII) with participants completing over 1.1 million questionnaires in the fall of 1982. CPSII used more explicit questions about sleep duration, insomnia, and "prescription sleeping pills." After controlling simultaneously for 32 covariates and confounders such as insomnia and sleep duration in Cox Proportional Hazards models, results again showed that use of hypnotics was associated with elevated mortality not attributable to major confounders such as cigarette smoking. Indeed, the mortality risk associated with

taking “prescription sleeping pills” was surprisingly comparable to that associated with smoking a pack of cigarettes a day⁵⁵.

Benefits of hypnotics: minimal

Popular prescribed hypnotics fail objectively to increase sleep significantly even at high doses

In an authoritative National Institutes of Health (NIH)-sponsored meta-analysis of controlled trials including unpublished trials¹²⁷, Buscemi and colleagues found that although non-benzodiazepine zolpidem-like drugs [“Z-drugs”] shortened sleep onset latency by an average of 12 minutes (9–17 min, 95% CI), according to objective polysomnograms, these hypnotics increased total sleep time by only 11 minutes (-1 to 23 min, 95% CI, NS). That is, these “Z” drugs produced no substantial statistically-reliable increase in total sleep, even at doses higher than currently recommended. Most of the meta-analyzed studies of zolpidem used doses of 10 mg or more (as high as 30 mg)¹²⁷, and most of the studies of zopiclone used 7.5 mg doses or more (containing more eszopiclone than any dose approved in the U.S.). The FDA-approved recommended initial zolpidem dosage for most patients is now 5 mg (6.25 mg for the sustained-release form¹²⁸.) Zolpidem and zolpidem-like drugs constitute the bulk of the current U.S. hypnotics market. Based on all available clinical studies, these lower doses would objectively increase sleep little if at all¹¹⁹. Indeed, the primary zolpidem manufacturer advised the FDA that the 5–6.25 mg dosages were generally ineffective³². The newly-recommended 1-mg dosage of eszopiclone is similarly ineffective^{129,130}. Patients typically report more increase in sleep than is measured objectively, but even this self-reported “improvement” at above-recommended doses (which is not supported by objective measurement) is a mere 32 minutes. (26–38 minutes, 95% CI)¹²⁷. The discrepancies between objective and patient-subjective data may be attributable to the amnesic properties of hypnotics, erasing patients’ memories of how much time they are awake in bed. In conclusion, the FDA-recommended doses of the most popular benzodiazepine agonists are virtually ineffective for objectively increasing sleep. Older benzodiazepines are not much more effective, if at all.

A new Comparative Effectiveness Review sponsored by the U.S. AHRQ has recently examined the Management of Insomnia Disorder, largely referring to chronic insomnia¹³¹. As a prepublication Peer Reviewer of this report, I was and still remain very critical of its limitation to mainly-subjective data that are known to give a rosier evaluation of hypnotic effects than objective evaluations, its focus on published reports that are known to be commonly biased towards reporting favorable drug results^{132,133}, and the AHRQ report’s incomplete attention to adverse effects. Nevertheless, it is striking that the AHRQ study found that the strongest evidence for treatment efficacy was with the cognitive-behavioral treatment of insomnia. The evidence for short-term efficacy of zolpidem and eszopiclone in high doses was considered less sufficient, and evidence for efficacy of other hypnotics was judged to be almost entirely insufficient. Moreover, by its clinical trial selection criteria, this Review found essentially no evidence for efficacy of the very low doses of zolpidem and eszopiclone currently recommended by the FDA for most patients, because higher doses appeared unsafe to FDA. In short, the AHRQ study presented no reason why hypnotics are needed, since cognitive-behavioral treatment of insomnia is better and is available even on the internet.

Moreover, the AHRQ Review found evidence for increased adverse effects with hypnotics compared to placebo, including hypnotic adverse effects of concern (their selection of studies highlighted fractures and dementia.) The Review found mention of adverse effects virtually absent for the cognitive-behavioral treatment studies¹³¹. Although the Comparative Effectiveness Review found insufficient studies to estimate the comparative effectiveness of hypnotics versus cognitive-behavioral treatments, when it reviewed potential harms, there was no contest. Moreover, controlled trials reviewed above prove that hypnotics cause comorbidities such as infection and depression and driving impairments, whereas cognitive-behavioral treatment has been found to decrease medical comorbidities such as depression⁶⁹.

Hypnotics fail to improve next-day performance or general health

Based on manufacturers’ advertising, patients expect that a hypnotic will improve their function and performance the following day. In fact, the truth is just the opposite. In 1982, two sleep experts received partial support from a hypnotics’ manufacturer to survey daytime performance literature about hypnotics and found, “Drug-related improvement in performance was not found, and, in comparing active drug to placebo, it is clear that all hypnotics, at some doses, produce decrements in performance the next day⁸¹.” Since 1982, the author has been looking for objective evidence that hypnotics improve the performance of insomnia patients. Decades later, no evidence that GABA-agonist hypnotics improve objective daytime performance in treating insomnia has been located. If there is a proven significant effect, it is to make performance worse^{89,134}. Incidentally, the AHRQ Comparative Effectiveness Review mentioned no objective evidence of functional benefits from hypnotic drugs¹³¹. On average, most hypnotics make patients more sleepy the next day, not more fully awake.

After 34 years, the author is still looking for evidence of objective functional benefit. In a recent letter to *Sleep Medicine*, readers were asked to inform us if “any U.S.-licensed hypnotic ever objectively improved any aspect of insomnia patients’ daytime function or any aspect of general health¹³⁵.” So far, nobody has informed me of any such evidence.

Hypnotic drugs are prescribed to patients without valid clinical indication

According to the U.S. National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, insomnia is a stated reason for a patient’s visit in less than one quarter of office visits where a hypnotic is prescribed², but for most of these drugs, insomnia could have been the only approved indication. Moreover, no diagnosis of any sleep disorder at all is made on 35% of office visits when a hypnotic is prescribed, and of the 65% of such patients who are diagnosed with a sleep disorder (such as hypersomnia and most forms of sleep apnea), often a hypnotic would be contraindicated². Other data have likewise shown that hypnotics are commonly prescribed for patients who have no diagnosis or complaint of insomnia^{126,136,137}. Thus, hypnotics are routinely being prescribed without any apparent valid indication in as much as three quarters of the cases. Moreover, it appears from the data reviewed above that in most cases or at least a great many, hypnotics are prescribed despite a specific contraindication. For example, in the 2015 Beers criteria of the American Geriatrics

Society, the hypnotics of concern in this presentation are all listed as drugs to avoid¹⁰⁹. It would be fanciful thinking to imagine that addicting hypnotics could be generally beneficial as usually prescribed: without indication and despite specific contraindications.

Manufacturers misrepresent hypnotic benefits in direct-to-consumer advertising

An instructive example is a 2006 advertisement representing that “[eszopiclone] provides a full night of sleep (7 to 8 hours).” An equivalent claim was made in a 2007 eszopiclone-hypnotic print advertisement titled “Sleep the night and seize the day. . . A better tomorrow begins tonight.” In the scientific study cited by both advertisements as evidence¹³⁸, the average sleep of patients receiving eszopiclone 2 mg was 382 minutes (6 hours, 22 min) and for 3 mg, it was 412 minutes (6 hours, 52 min). The clinical results cited did not support the manufacturer’s claims to “a full 7 to 8 hours of sleep,” even though the 2 mg and 3 mg doses then studied were greater than the currently-recommended starting doses.

As for the manufacturer’s advertised benefits of “seizing the day,” and a “better tomorrow,” the eszopiclone manufacturer’s study demonstrated no significant objective improvement in measured next-day daytime performance or accomplishment. Specifically, an objective morning performance test did not demonstrate significantly better performance with eszopiclone than with placebo¹³⁸.

It is not my intention to imply that misrepresentation in consumer advertising has come only from a single manufacturer. There have been many examples with other hypnotics.

Summary of benefits and risks

The evidence is clear: the most popular hypnotics offer little to no benefit to patients in recommended doses. This statement applies most specifically to zolpidem, temazepam, eszopiclone, zaleplon, triazolam, flurazepam, quazepam, and barbiturates used for sleep. The most recent American Academy of Sleep Medicine’s Clinical Guideline for Management of Chronic Insomnia¹³⁹ stated that the primary goals of treatment of insomnia should be to increase sleep quantity and to enhance daytime function. To the contrary, popular hypnotics do not increase objective sleep substantially (if at all.) and for many patients, hypnotics cause substantial objective next-day functional impairment. In confirmation, FDA records show that the lead manufacturer of zolpidem (the most commonly-prescribed hypnotic) stated that the FDA-recommended dosage was ineffective³². The National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey indicated that over three quarters of hypnotic prescriptions are given to patients who do not even come to the physician for insomnia². Yet the specified hypnotics do not substantially improve objective sleep or objective daytime performance and have no known objective benefits for any aspect of general health.

Contrasting with the questionable benefits, the popular benzodiazepine agonists in the U.S. are associated with increased mortality hazards, comparable to the hazards of barbiturates. Medical examiner data document that over 10,000 deaths every year are directly caused by and attributed to hypnotic drugs, and there is substantial evidence that hypnotics cause additional covert respiratory depression, suicides, infection, cancer, accidents, and other disorders that lead to a far larger number of deaths as well as to non-fatal morbidities and suffering. Use of hypnotics kills large numbers of Americans yearly; however, the exact number of deaths caused by hypnotics cannot be estimated from medical examiner data alone¹¹², because most of the deaths produced by hypnotics are covert or indirect due to hypnotic-induced or hypnotic-exacerbated morbidities such as respiratory depression, infection, accidents, etc.

This presentation focused primarily on zolpidem, temazepam, eszopiclone, zaleplon, triazolam, flurazepam, quazepam, and barbiturates used for sleep (such as pentobarbital, amobarbital, and secobarbital). These specified drugs have little or no benefit for insomnia, and are commonly not even prescribed for presenting insomnia or other approved indications. These drugs were the focus because each has been shown epidemiologically to be associated with high mortality hazards¹⁶. There are other hypnotics approved for treating insomnia in the U.S.: specifically, diphenhydramine, ramelteon, doxepin, and suvorexant. Moreover, other drugs very commonly prescribed for sleep include trazodone (off label) and melatonin (unregulated). This presentation was not focused on these other drugs used as hypnotics, either because the epidemiologic and controlled-trials data have not been sufficient to assess their risks as hypnotics or because these drugs are approved and may be effective for indications other than insomnia.

In the supplement to the Geisinger Health System study, the best-estimate extrapolation from the data suggested that 300,000 – 500,000 deaths each year in the U.S. were associated with hypnotic usage¹⁶. The risks of under-estimation in this study were thought to be as great as the risks of over-estimation. Since this estimate was derived from risk ratios fully-adjusted for confounders, it is plausible that most of the association was causal.

This hypnotic mortality risk is almost comparable to that of cigarette smoking and many-fold greater than the risk to Americans of violent death.

Hypnotic drugs	300,000–500,000 U.S. deaths per year ¹⁶
Cigarettes	560,000 U.S. deaths per year ¹⁴⁰
Murders	14,196 U.S. deaths in 2013

The number of hypnotic-associated deaths may be almost comparable to the number of deaths attributed to cigarette smoking (560,000), cancer (585,000), or heart disease (611,000).

Apart from hypnotics, the preferred treatment for insomnia is the cognitive-behavioral treatment of insomnia, which appears to be more effective in the long run, better for comorbidities, and safer¹³¹. Cognitive-behavioral therapy can be effectively provided through written materials, internet training programs, and brief group therapies. It has been argued that cognitive-behavioral treatment saves money, compared to hypnotics¹⁴¹.

Circadian rhythm timing disorders can cause the biologic propensity for sleep to be either delayed (causing trouble falling asleep and trouble waking in the morning) or too advanced (causing evening sleepiness and early awakening). It is unclear how often the circadian rhythm timing disorders have a more important role in insomnia than the cognitive-behavioral elements, but one estimate suggests that “eveningness” may be associated with trouble falling asleep in as much as one quarter of the adult population¹⁴². When circadian timing issues are important, properly timed bright light treatment can be a safe, effective, and inexpensive non-drug treatment that also has benefits for comorbidities such as depression, but more clinical trials are needed to better define the applicability of bright light treatment for insomnia.

A very recent Clinical Practice Guideline from the American College of Physicians has recommended that cognitive behavioral therapy be the initial treatment for chronic insomnia disorder. Because of only very weak evidence for benefits and more impressive evidence for occasional serious harms, the Guideline left uncertain whether hypnotics were ever wise as a secondary

treatment for short-term use, and the Guideline did not recommend long-term hypnotic prescribing at all¹⁴³.

Competing interests

Since 1979 publication of hypnotics’ epidemiology from the American Cancer Society CPSI study, the author has been a frequent critic of hypnotics risks and benefits, especially through his non-profit internet web site, www.DarkSideOfSleepingPills.com, that offers readers additional information and references about hypnotics. Dr. Kripke’s family owns non-controlling stock and options in a large conglomerate that in turn invested a tiny percentage of its capital in Sanofi-Aventis and Johnson and Johnson stock. The author has advised the USA Food and Drug Administration to take certain actions regarding hypnotics (Petition available at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=FDA-2015-P-3959>), and related litigation may arise. The author has no relevant affiliations or financial involvement with any organization or entity with a financial interest in or financial conflict with the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript. This includes employment, consultancies, honoraria, other stock ownership or options, expert testimony, grants or patents received or pending or royalties. No writing assistance was utilized in the production of this manuscript.

Grant information

The author declared that no grants were involved in supporting this work.

Appendix A: Epidemiologic Studies of the Mortality Risks of Hypnotic Drugs

- 1) Sun, Y., Lin, C. C., Lu, C. J., Hsu, C. Y., and Kao, C. H. Association Between Zolpidem and Suicide: A Nationwide Population-Based Case-Control Study. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2016;**91**(3):308-315.
- 2) Lan, T. Y., Zeng, Y. F., Tang, G. J., Kao, H. C., Chiu, H. J., Lan, T. H., and Ho, H. F. The use of hypnotics and mortality - A population-based retrospective cohort study. *PLoS One.* **10**(12), e0145271. 2015.
- 3) Palmaro A, Dupouy J, Lapeyre-Mestre M. Benzodiazepines and risk of death: Results from two large cohort studies in France and UK. *Eur Neuropsychopharmacol* 2015;**25**(10), 1566-1577.
- 4) Chung, W. S., Lai, C. Y., Lin, C. L., and Kao, C. H. Adverse respiratory events associated with hypnotics use in patients of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: A population-based case-control Study. *Medicine (Baltimore)* **94**(27), e1110. 2015.
- 5) Kriegbaum, M., Hendriksen, C. Vass, M., Mortensen, E. L., Osler, M. Hypnotics and mortality—partial confounding by disease, substance abuse and socioeconomic factors? *Pharmacoepidemiol Drug Saf* 2015;**24**(7):779-783.
- 6) Pinot J, Herr M, Robine JM, Aegerter P, Arvieu JJ, Ankri J. Does the Prescription of Anxiolytic and Hypnotic Drugs Increase Mortality in Older Adults? *J Am Geriatr Soc* 2015;**63**(6):1263-5.
- 7) Weisberg DF, Gordon KS, Barry DT, Becker WC, Crystal S, Edelman EJ, Gaither J, Gordon AJ, Goulet J, Kerns RD, Moore BA, Tate J, Justice AC, Fiellin DA. Long-term Prescription of Opioids and/or Benzodiazepines and Mortality Among HIV-Infected and Uninfected Patients. *J Acquir Immune Defic Syndr* 2015;**69**(2):223-33.
- 8) Nakafero G, Sanders RD, Nguyen-Van-Tam JS, Myles PR. Association between benzodiazepine use and exacerbations and mortality in patients with asthma: a matched case-control and survival analysis using the United Kingdom Clinical Practice Research Datalink. *Pharmacoepidemiol Drug Saf* 2015;**24**(8):793-802.

- 9) Neutel CI, Johansen HL. Association between hypnotics use and increased mortality: causation or confounding? *Eur J Clin Pharmacol* 2015;**71**(5):637-42.
- 10) Frandsen R, Baandrup L, Kjellberg J, Ibsen R, Jennum P. Increased all-cause mortality with psychotropic medication in Parkinson's disease and controls: a national register-based study. *Parkinsonism Relat Disord* 2014;**20**(11):1124-8.
- 11) Weich S, Pearce HL, Croft P, Singh S, Crome I, Bashford J, Frisher M. Effect of anxiolytic and hypnotic drug prescriptions on mortality hazards: retrospective cohort study. *BMJ* 2014;**348**:g1996.
- 12) Chen H-C, Su T-P, Chou P. A 9-year Follow-up Study of Sleep Patterns and Mortality in Community-Dwelling Older Adults in Taiwan. *Sleep* 2013;**36**(8):1187-98.
- 13) Gunnell D, Chang SS, Tsai MK, Tsao CK, Wen CP. Sleep and suicide: an analysis of a cohort of 394,000 Taiwanese adults. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol.* 2013 Apr 2;**48**: 1457-65.
- 14) Jaussent I, Ancelin ML, Berr C, Peres K, Scali J, Besset A, Ritchie K, Dauvilliers Y. Hypnotics and mortality in an elderly general population: a 12-year prospective study. *BMC Med* 2013;**11**(1):212.
- 15) Obiora E, Hubbard R, Sanders RD, Myles PR. The impact of benzodiazepines on occurrence of pneumonia and mortality from pneumonia: a nested case-control and survival analysis in a population-based cohort. *Thorax* 2012;**68**(2):163-70.
- 16) Hartz A, Ross JJ. Cohort study of the association of hypnotic use with mortality in postmenopausal women. *BMJ Open* 2012;2:pil: e001413. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2012-001413.
- 17) Kripke DF, Langer RD, Kline LE. Hypnotics' association with mortality or cancer: a matched cohort study. *BMJ Open* 2012;2(1):e000850.
- 18) Gisev N, Hartikainen S, Chen TF, Korhonen M, Bell JS. Mortality associated with benzodiazepines and benzodiazepine-related drugs among community-dwelling older people in Finland: a population-based retrospective cohort study. *Can J Psychiatry* 2011;**56**(6):377-81.
- 19) Rod NH, Vahtera J, Westerlund H, Kivimäki M, Zins M, Goldberg M, Lange T. Sleep Disturbances and Cause-Specific Mortality: Results From the GAZEL Cohort Study. *Am J Epidemiol* 2010;**173**(3):300-9.
- 20) Belleville G. Mortality hazard associated with anxiolytic and hypnotic drug use in the national population health survey. *Can J Psychiatry* 2010;**55**(9):558-67.
- 21) Mallon L, Broman JE, Hetta J. Is usage of hypnotics associated with mortality? *Sleep Med* 2009;**10**(3):279-86.
- 22) Winkelmayr WC, Mehta J, Wang PS. Benzodiazepine use and mortality of incident dialysis patients in the United States. *Kidney Int* 2007;**72**(11):1388-93.
- 23) Hublin C, Partinen M, Koskenvuo M, Kaprio J. Sleep and mortality: a population-based 22-year follow-up study. *Sleep* 2007;**30**(10):1245-53.
- 24) Hoffmann VP, Dossenbach M, West TM, Lowry AJ. Mortality in a cohort of outpatients with schizophrenia: 3-year outcomes from the Intercontinental Outpatient Health Outcomes Study (IC-SOHO). *Biol Psychiatry* **61**(8S):163S-164S. Accessed 2007.
- 25) Hausken AM, Skurtveit S, Tverdal A. Use of anxiolytic or hypnotic drugs and total mortality in a general middle-aged population. *Pharmacoepidemiol Drug Saf* 2007;**16**(8):913-8.
- 26) Fukuhara S, Green J, Albert J, Mihara H, Pisoni R, Yamazaki S, Akiba T, Akizawa T, Asano Y, Saito A, Port F, Held P, Kurokawa K. Symptoms of depression, prescription of benzodiazepines, and the risk of death in hemodialysis patients in Japan. *Kidney Int* 2006;**70**(10):1866-72.
- 27) Lack LC, Prior K, Luszcz M. 708. Does insomnia kill the elderly? *Sleep* **29**[Abstract Supplement], A240. Accessed 2006.
- 28) Phillips B, Mannino DM. Does insomnia kill? *Sleep* 2005;**28**(8):965-71.
- 29) Ahmad R, Bath PA. Identification of risk factors for 15-year mortality among community-dwelling older people using Cox regression and a genetic algorithm. *J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci* 2005;**60A**:1052-8.
- 30) Mallon L, Broman J-E, Hetta J. Sleep complaints predict coronary artery disease mortality in males: a 12-year follow-up study of a middle-aged Swedish population. *J Int Med* 2002;**251**:207-16.
- 31) Hedner J, Caidahl K, Sjöland H, Karlsson T, Herlitz J. Sleep habits and their association with mortality during 5-year follow-up after coronary artery bypass surgery. *Acta Cardiol* 2002;**57**(5): 341-8.
- 32) Kripke DF, Garfinkel L, Wingard DL, Klauber MR, Marler MR. Mortality associated with sleep duration and insomnia. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2002;**59**(2):131-6.
- 33) Kripke DF, Klauber MR, Wingard DL, Fell RL, Assmus JD, Garfinkel L. Mortality hazard associated with prescription hypnotics. *Biol Psychiatry* 1998;**43**(9):687-93.
- 34) Merlo J, Ostergren PO, Mansson NO, Hanson BS, Ranstam J, Blennow G, Isacson SO, Melander A. Mortality in elderly men with low psychosocial coping resources using anxiolytic-hypnotic drugs. *Scand J Public Health* 2000;**28**(4):294-7.

- 35) Sundquist J, Ekedahl A, Johansson S-E. Sales of tranquillizers, hypnotics/sedatives and antidepressants and their relationship with underprivileged area score and mortality and suicide rates. *Eur J Clin Pharmacol* 1996;**51**:105-9.
- 36) Hays JC, Blazer DG, Foley DJ. Risk of napping: excessive daytime sleepiness and mortality in an older community population. *J Am Geriatr Soc* 1996;**44**:693-8.
- 37) Merlo J, Hedblad B, Ogren M, Ranstam J, Ostergren PO, Ekedahl A, Hanson BS, Isacson SO, Liedholm H, Melander A. Increased risk of ischaemic heart disease mortality in elderly men using anxiolytics-hypnotics and analgesics. *Eur J Clin Pharmacol* 1996;**49**:261-5.
- 38) Brabbins CJ, Dewey ME, Copeland RM, Davidson IA, McWilliam C, Saunders P, Sharma VK, Sullivan C. Insomnia in the elderly: Prevalence, gender differences and relationships with morbidity and mortality. *Int J Ger Psych* 1993;**8**:473-80.
- 39) Thorogood M, Cowen P, Mann J, Murphy M, Vessey M. Fatal myocardial infarction and use of psychotropic drugs in young women. *Lancet* 1992;**340**:1067-8.
- 40) Isacson D, Carsjo K, Bergman U, Blackburn JL. Long-term use of benzodiazepines in a Swedish community: an eight-year follow-up. *J Clin Epidemiol* 1992 Apr;**45**(4): 429-36.
- 41) Rumble R, Morgan K. Hypnotics, sleep, and mortality in elderly people. *J Am Geriatr Soc* 1992;**40**:787-91.
- 42) Kripke DF, Simons RN, Garfinkel L, Hammond EC. Short and long sleep and sleeping pills: Is increased mortality associated? *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 1979;**36**(1):103-16.

References

1. Rudd RA, Aleshire N, Zibbell JE, *et al.*: **Increases in Drug and Opioid Overdose Deaths—United States, 2000–2014**. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. 2016; **64**(50–51): 1378–82.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
2. Ford ES, Wheaton AG, Cunningham TJ, *et al.*: **Trends in Outpatient Visits for Insomnia, Sleep Apnea, and Prescriptions for Sleep Medications among US Adults: Findings from the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey 1999–2010**. *Sleep*. 2014; **37**(8): 1283–93.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
3. Larochelle MR, Zhang F, Ross-Degnan D, *et al.*: **Trends in opioid prescribing and co-prescribing of sedative hypnotics for acute and chronic musculoskeletal pain: 2001–2010**. *Pharmacoepidemiol Drug Saf*. 2015; **24**(8): 885–92.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
4. Kolata G, Cohen S: **Drug overdoses propel rise in mortality rates of young whites**. *International NY Times*. 2016.
[Reference Source](#)
5. Case A, Deaton A: **Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century**. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2015; **112**(49): 15078–83.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
6. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration CIBHSAQ: **The DAWN Report: Benzodiazepines in combination with opioid pain relievers or alcohol: Greater risk of more serious ED visit outcomes**. *Dawn*. 2014; **192**: 1–6.
[Reference Source](#)
7. Rockett IR, Caine ED: **Self-injury is the eighth leading cause of death in the United States: It is time to pay attention**. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2015; **72**(11): 1069–70.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
8. Curtin SC, Warner M, Hedegaard H: **Increase in Suicide in the United States, 1999–2014**. Hyattsville, M.D., National Center for Health Statistics. *NCHS Data Brief*. 2016; (241): 1–8.
[PubMed Abstract](#)
9. Youssef NA, Rich CL: **Does acute treatment with sedatives/hypnotics for anxiety in depressed patients affect suicide risk? A literature review**. *Ann Clin Psychiatry*. 2008; **20**(3): 157–69.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
10. Merlo J, Hedblad B, Ogren M, *et al.*: **Increased risk of ischaemic heart disease mortality in elderly men using anxiolytics-hypnotics and analgesics. Results of the 10-year follow-up of the prospective population study “Men born in 1914”, Malmö, Sweden**. *Eur J Clin Pharmacol*. 1996; **49**(4): 261–5.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
11. Lan TY, Zeng YF, Tang GJ, *et al.*: **The Use of Hypnotics and Mortality—A Population-Based Retrospective Cohort Study**. *PLoS One*. 2015; **10**(12): e0145271.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
12. Kripke DF: **Mortality Risk of Hypnotics: Strengths and Limits of Evidence**. *Drug Saf*. 2016; **39**(2): 93–107.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
13. Ioannidis JP: **Exposure-wide epidemiology: revisiting Bradford Hill**. *Stat Med*. 2016; **35**(11): 1749–62.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
14. Palmaro A, Dupouy J, Lapeyre-Mestre M: **Benzodiazepines and risk of death: Results from two large cohort studies in France and UK**. *Eur Neuropsychopharmacol*. 2015; **25**(10): 1566–77.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
15. Chung WS, Lai CY, Lin CL, *et al.*: **Adverse Respiratory Events Associated With Hypnotics Use in Patients of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease: A Population-Based Case-Control Study**. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2015; **94**(27): e1110.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
16. Kripke DF, Langer RD, Kline LE: **Hypnotics’ association with mortality or cancer: a matched cohort study**. *BMJ Open*. 2012; **2**(1): e000850.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
17. Weich S, Pearce HL, Croft P, *et al.*: **Effect of anxiolytic and hypnotic drug prescriptions on mortality hazards: retrospective cohort study**. *BMJ*. 2014; **348**: g1996.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
18. Neutel CI, Johansen HL: **Association between hypnotics use and increased mortality: causation or confounding?** *Eur J Clin Pharmacol*. 2015; **71**(5): 637–42.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
19. Kripke DF, Garfinkel L, Wingard DL, *et al.*: **Mortality associated with sleep duration and insomnia**. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2002; **59**(2): 131–6.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
20. Chen HC, Su TP, Chou P: **A nine-year follow-up study of sleep patterns and mortality in community-dwelling older adults in Taiwan**. *Sleep*. 2013; **36**(8): 1187–98.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
21. Mallon L, Broman JE, Hetta J: **Is usage of hypnotics associated with mortality?** *Sleep Med*. 2009; **10**(3): 279–86.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
22. Belleville G: **Mortality hazard associated with anxiolytic and hypnotic drug use in the national population health survey**. *Can J Psychiatry*. 2010; **55**(9): 558–67.
[PubMed Abstract](#)
23. Kripke DF: **Greater incidence of depression with hypnotic use than with placebo**. *BMC Psychiatry*. 2007; **7**: 42.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
24. Kripke DF: **Hypnotics cause insomnia: evidence from clinical trials**. *Sleep Med*. 2014; **15**(9): 1168–9.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
25. Cooper JR: **Sedative-Hypnotic Drugs: Risks and Benefits**. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of HEW, National Inst. on Drug Abuse; 1977.
[Reference Source](#)
26. Kripke DF, Garfinkel L: **Excess nocturnal deaths related to sleeping pill and tranquilliser use**. *Lancet*. 1984; **1**(8368): 99.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
27. Leary S, Members of Panel: **AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals**: 2016; **35**(11): 1749–62.

2013. Edition 2013.0.1. Schaumburg, IL: American Veterinary Medical Association; 2013.
[Reference Source](#)
28. Wikibooks contributors: **Pentobarbital**. Accessed 8-26-2015. Wikibooks, The Free Textbook Project. Wikibooks.
[Reference Source](#)
29. Farkas RH, Katz R, Illoh K, *et al.*: **Application Number 204569Orig1s000: Medical Review(s)**. Accessed 6-25-2013.
[Reference Source](#)
30. Lalley PM: **Opioidergic and dopaminergic modulation of respiration**. *Respir Physiol Neurobiol*. 2008; **164**(1–2): 160–7.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
31. Joya FL, Kripke DF, Loving RT, *et al.*: **Meta-Analyses of Hypnotics and Infections: eszopiclone, ramelteon, zaleplon, and zolpidem**. *J Clin Sleep Med*. 2009; **5**(4): 377–83.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
32. Farkas R, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research: **Approval Package for: Application Number: 019908Orig1s032s034 021774Orig1s013s015**. Accessed 2013. Silver Spring, MD, FDA. 2013.
[Reference Source](#)
33. Obiora E, Hubbard R, Sanders RD, *et al.*: **The impact of benzodiazepines on occurrence of pneumonia and mortality from pneumonia: a nested case-control and survival analysis in a population-based cohort**. *Thorax*. 2013; **68**(2): 163–70.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
34. Iqbal U, Syed-Abdul S, Nguyen PA, *et al.*: **The impact of benzodiazepines on occurrence of pneumonia and mortality from pneumonia: a nested case-control and survival analysis in a population-based cohort**. *Thorax*. 2013; **68**(6): 591–2.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
35. Huang CY, Chou FH, Huang YS, *et al.*: **The association between zolpidem and infection in patients with sleep disturbance**. *J Psychiatr Res*. 2014; **54**(7): 116–20.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
36. Liao KF, Lin CL, Lai SW, *et al.*: **Zolpidem Use Associated With Increased Risk of Pyogenic Liver Abscess: A Case-Control Study in Taiwan**. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2015; **94**(32): e1302.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
37. Nakafero G, Sanders RD, Nguyen-Van-Tam JS, *et al.*: **Association between benzodiazepine use and exacerbations and mortality in patients with asthma: a matched case-control and survival analysis using the United Kingdom Clinical Practice Research Datalink**. *Pharmacoepidemiol Drug Saf*. 2015; **24**(8): 793–802.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
38. Pavon JM, Zhao Y, McConnell E, *et al.*: **Identifying risk of readmission in hospitalized elderly adults through inpatient medication exposure**. *J Am Geriatr Soc*. 2014; **62**(6): 1116–21.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
39. Sanders RD, Godlee A, Fujimori T, *et al.*: **Benzodiazepine augmented γ -aminobutyric acid signaling increases mortality from pneumonia in mice**. *Crit Care Med*. 2013; **41**(7): 1627–36.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
40. Huemer HP, Lassnig C, Nowotny N, *et al.*: **Diazepam leads to enhanced severity of orthopoxvirus infection and immune suppression**. *Vaccine*. 2010; **28**(38): 6152–8.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
41. Massoco C, Palermo-Neto J: **Effects of midazolam on equine innate immune response: a flow cytometric study**. *Vet Immunol Immunopathol*. 2003; **95**(1–2): 11–9.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
42. Torres SR, Fröde TS, Nardi GM, *et al.*: **Anti-inflammatory effects of peripheral benzodiazepine receptor ligands in two mouse models of inflammation**. *Eur J Pharmacol*. 2000; **408**(2): 199–211.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
43. Kripke DF: **Possibility that certain hypnotics might cause cancer in skin**. *J Sleep Res*. 2008; **17**(3): 245–50.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
44. Roth T, Zammit GK, Scharf MB, *et al.*: **Efficacy and safety of as-needed, post bedtime dosing with indiplon in insomnia patients with chronic difficulty maintaining sleep**. *Sleep*. 2007; **30**(12): 1731–8.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
45. Scharf MB, Black J, Hull S, *et al.*: **Long-term nightly treatment with indiplon in adults with primary insomnia: results of a double-blind, placebo-controlled, 3-month study**. *Sleep*. 2007; **30**(6): 743–52.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
46. Weissinger J: **NDA 19-908 Ambien Pharmacology Memos & Exclusivity Summary**. 1991.
[Reference Source](#)
47. Andreason PJ, Brugge K, Katz R: Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. **Approval Package for: Application Number 21-476: Medical Review(s)**. 2004.
[Reference Source](#)
48. Amerio A, Gálvez JF, Odono A, *et al.*: **Carcinogenicity of psychotropic drugs: A systematic review of US Food and Drug Administration-required preclinical in vivo studies**. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry*. 2015; **49**(8): 686–96.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
49. Roca R, McNeil DE, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research: **Application Number 21-782: Medical Review(s)**. 2005; 1–315.
[Reference Source](#)
50. Fitzgerald GG, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research: **Application Number 020859: Pharmacology Review(s)**. FDA. 1998.
[Reference Source](#)
51. Wikipedia contributors: **Clastogen**. Wikipedia. Accessed 6-20-2014.
[Reference Source](#)
52. Wasserman A, Mellon RD, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research: **Application number 21-774: Pharmacology Reviews(s)**. FDA. 2005.
[Reference Source](#)
53. Grivennikov SI, Greten FR, Karin M: **Immunity, inflammation, and cancer**. *Cell*. 2010; **140**(6): 883–99.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
54. Mallon L, Broman JE, Hetta J: **Sleep complaints predict coronary artery disease mortality in males: a 12-year follow-up study of a middle-aged Swedish population**. *J Int Med*. 2002; **251**(3): 207–16.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
55. Kripke DF, Klauber MR, Wingard DL, *et al.*: **Mortality hazard associated with prescription hypnotics**. *Biol Psychiatry*. 1998; **43**(9): 687–93.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
56. Hartz A, Ross JJ: **Cohort study of the association of hypnotic use with mortality in postmenopausal women**. *BMJ Open*. 2012; **2**(5): pii: e001413.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
57. Kao CH, Sun LM, Liang JA, *et al.*: **Relationship of zolpidem and cancer risk: a Taiwanese population-based cohort study**. *Mayo Clin Proc*. 2012; **87**(5): 430–6.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
58. Wen CP, Levy DT, Cheng TY, *et al.*: **Smoking behaviour in Taiwan, 2001**. *Tob Control*. 2005; **14**(Suppl 1): i51–i55.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
59. Chu NF: **Prevalence of obesity in Taiwan**. *Obes Rev*. 2005; **6**(4): 271–4.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
60. Kao CH, Sun LM, Su KP, *et al.*: **Benzodiazepine use possibly increases cancer risk: a population-based retrospective cohort study in Taiwan**. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2012; **73**(4): e555–e560.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
61. Iqbal U, Jian WS, Huang CW, *et al.*: **Do all hypnotic and sedatives have risk for cancer?** *Sleep Med*. 2015; pii: S1389-9457(15)00867-9, in press.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
62. Jiao L, Duan Z, Sangi-Haghpeykar H, *et al.*: **Sleep duration and incidence of colorectal cancer in postmenopausal women**. *Br J Cancer*. 2013; **108**(1): 213–21.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
63. Pottegård A, Friis S, Andersen M, *et al.*: **Use of benzodiazepines or benzodiazepine related drugs and the risk of cancer: a population-based case-control study**. *Br J Clin Pharmacol*. 2013; **75**(5): 1356–64.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
64. Sivertsen B, Salo P, Pentti J, *et al.*: **Use of sleep medications and risk of cancer: a matched case-control study**. *Sleep Med*. 2015; **16**(12): 1552–5.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
65. Kripke DF, Langer RD: **Evidence for harm, comment on 'Use of benzodiazepines or benzodiazepine related drugs and the risk of cancer: a population-based case-control study'**. *Br J Clin Pharmacol*. 2014; **78**(1): 186–7.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
66. Gagliardi GS, Shah AP, Goldstein M, *et al.*: **Effect of zolpidem on the sleep arousal response to nocturnal esophageal acid exposure**. *Clin Gastroenterol Hepatol*. 2009; **7**(9): 948–52.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
67. Friedman GD, Udaltsova N, Chan J, *et al.*: **Screening pharmaceuticals for possible carcinogenic effects: initial positive results for drugs not previously screened**. *Cancer Causes Control*. 2009; **20**(10): 1821–35.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
68. Friedman GD, Jiang SF, Udaltsova N, *et al.*: **Epidemiologic evaluation of pharmaceuticals with limited evidence of carcinogenicity**. *Int J Cancer*. 2009; **125**(9): 2173–8.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
69. Wu JQ, Appleman ER, Salazar RD, *et al.*: **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia Comorbid With Psychiatric and Medical Conditions: A Meta-analysis**. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2015; **175**(9): 1461–72.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
70. Fava M, McCall WV, Krystal A, *et al.*: **Eszopiclone co-administered with fluoxetine in patients with insomnia coexisting with major depressive disorder**. *Biol Psychiatry*. 2006; **59**(11): 1052–60.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
71. Fava M, Asnis GM, Shrivastava RK, *et al.*: **Improved insomnia symptoms and sleep-related next-day functioning in patients with comorbid major depressive disorder and insomnia following concomitant zolpidem extended-release 12.5 mg and escitalopram treatment: a randomized controlled trial**. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2011; **72**(7): 914–28.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
72. Tan TL, Bixler EO, Kales A, *et al.*: **Early morning insomnia, daytime anxiety, and organic mental disorder associated with triazolam**. *J Fam Pract*. 1985; **20**(6): 592–4.
[PubMed Abstract](#)

73. Levi J, Segal LM, Martin A: **The Facts Hurt: A state-by-state injury prevention policy report.** Washington, D.C.: Trust for America's Health; 2015.
[Reference Source](#)
74. Sun Y, Lin CC, Lu CJ, *et al.*: **Association Between Zolpidem and Suicide: A Nationwide Population-Based Case-Control Study.** *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2016; 91(3): 308–15.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
75. Pressman MR: **Sleep driving: sleepwalking variant or misuse of z-drugs?** *Sleep Med Rev.* 2011; 15(5): 285–92.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
76. Breiding MJ, Wiersma B: **Variability of undetermined manner of death classification in the US.** *Inj Prev.* 2006; 12(Suppl 2): ii49–ii54.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
77. Carlsten A, Waern M: **Are sedatives and hypnotics associated with increased suicide risk of suicide in the elderly?** *BMC Geriatr.* 2009; 9(1): 20.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
78. Brower KJ, McCammon RJ, Wojnar M, *et al.*: **Prescription sleeping pills, insomnia, and suicidality in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication.** *J Clin Psychiatry.* 2011; 72(4): 515–21.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
79. Gunnell D, Chang SS, Tsai MK, *et al.*: **Sleep and suicide: an analysis of a cohort of 394,000 Taiwanese adults.** *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol.* 2013; 48(9): 1457–65.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
80. Darke S, Deady M, Duflou J: **Toxicology and characteristics of deaths involving zolpidem in New South Wales, Australia 2001–2010.** *J Forensic Sci.* 2012; 57(5): 1259–62.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
81. Johnson LC, Chernik DA: **Sedative-hypnotics and human performance.** *Psychopharmacology (Berl).* 1982; 76(2): 101–13.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
82. Drover D, Lemmens H, Naidu S, *et al.*: **Pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics, and relative pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic profiles of zaleplon and zolpidem.** *Clin Ther.* 2000; 22(12): 1443–61.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
83. Poceta JS: **Zolpidem ingestion, automatism, and sleep driving: a clinical and legal case series.** *J Clin Sleep Med.* 2011; 7(6): 632–8.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
84. Tsai JH, Yang P, Chen CC, *et al.*: **Zolpidem-induced amnesia and somnambulism: rare occurrences?** *Eur Neuropsychopharmacol.* 2009; 19(1): 74–6.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
85. Morgenthaler TI, Silber MH: **Amnestic sleep-related eating disorder associated with zolpidem.** *Sleep Med.* 2002; 3(4): 323–7.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
86. Oster G, Huse DM, Adams SF, *et al.*: **Benzodiazepine tranquilizers and the risk of accidental injury.** *Am J Public Health.* 1990; 80(12): 1467–70.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
87. Lai MM, Lin CC, Lin CC, *et al.*: **Long-term use of zolpidem increases the risk of major injury: a population-based cohort study.** *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2014; 89(5): 589–94.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
88. Chung SD, Lin CC, Wang LH, *et al.*: **Zolpidem Use and the Risk of Injury: A Population-Based Follow-Up Study.** *PLoS One.* 2013; 8(6): e67459.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
89. Verster JC, Veldhuijzen DS, Patat A, *et al.*: **Hypnotics and driving safety: meta-analyses of randomized controlled trials applying the on-the-road driving test.** *Curr Drug Saf.* 2006; 1(1): 63–71.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
90. Verster JC, Spence DW, Shahid A, *et al.*: **Zopiclone as positive control in studies examining the residual effects of hypnotic drugs on driving ability.** *Curr Drug Saf.* 2011; 6(4): 209–18.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
91. Verster JC, Roth T: **Drivers can poorly predict their own driving impairment: a comparison between measurements of subjective and objective driving quality.** *Psychopharmacology (Berl).* 2012; 219(3): 775–81.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
92. Orriols L, Philip P, Moore N, *et al.*: **Benzodiazepine-like hypnotics and the associated risk of road traffic accidents.** *Clin Pharmacol Ther.* 2011; 89(4): 595–601.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
93. Philip P, Chauton C, Orriols L, *et al.*: **Complaints of Poor Sleep and Risk of Traffic Accidents: A Population-Based Case-Control Study.** *PLoS One.* 2014; 9(12): e114102.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
94. Hansen RN, Boudreau DM, Ebel BE, *et al.*: **Sedative Hypnotic Medication Use and the Risk of Motor Vehicle Crash.** *Am J Public Health.* 2015; 105(8): e64–e69.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
95. Hemmelgarn B, Suissa S, Huang A, *et al.*: **Benzodiazepine use and the risk of motor vehicle crash in the elderly.** *JAMA.* 1997; 278(1): 27–31.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
96. Gustavsen I, Bramness JG, Skurtveit S, *et al.*: **Road traffic accident risk related to prescriptions of the hypnotics zopiclone, zolpidem, flunitrazepam and nitrazepam.** *Sleep Med.* 2008; 9(8): 818–22.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
97. Hedlund J, Ahlner J, Kristiansson M, *et al.*: **A population-based study on toxicological findings in Swedish homicide victims and offenders from 2007 to 2009.** *Forensic Sci Int.* 2014; 244: 25–9.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
98. Tinetti ME, Speechley M, Ginter SF: **Risk factors for falls among elderly persons living in the community.** *N Engl J Med.* 1988; 319(26): 1701–7.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
99. Wang PS, Bohn RL, Glynn RJ, *et al.*: **Hazardous benzodiazepine regimens in the elderly: Effects of half-life, dosage, and duration on risk of hip fracture.** *Am J Psychiatry.* 2001; 158(6): 892–8.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
100. Wang PS, Bohn RL, Glynn RJ, *et al.*: **Zolpidem use and hip fractures in older people.** *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2001; 49(12): 1685–90.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
101. Cumming RG, Le Couteur DG: **Benzodiazepines and risk of hip fractures in older people: a review of the evidence.** *CNS Drugs.* 2003; 17(11): 825–37.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
102. Kang DY, Park S, Rhee CW, *et al.*: **Zolpidem use and risk of fracture in elderly insomnia patients.** *J Prev Med Public Health.* 2012; 45(4): 219–26.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
103. Berry SD, Lee Y, Cai S, *et al.*: **Nonbenzodiazepine Sleep Medication Use and Hip Fractures in Nursing Home Residents.** *JAMA Intern Med.* 2013; 173(9): 754–61.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
104. Kolla BP, Lovely JK, Mansukhani MP, *et al.*: **Zolpidem is independently associated with increased risk of inpatient falls.** *J Hosp Med.* 2013; 8(1): 1–6.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
105. Diem SJ, Ewing SK, Stone KL, *et al.*: **Use of non-benzodiazepine sedative hypnotics and risk of falls in older men.** *J Gerontol Geriatr Res.* 2014; 3(3): 158.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
106. Park SM, Ryu J, Lee DR, *et al.*: **Zolpidem use and risk of fractures: a systematic review and meta-analysis.** *Osteoporos Int.* In press, 2016; 1–10.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
107. Avidan AY, Fries BE, James ML, *et al.*: **Insomnia and hypnotic use, recorded in the minimum data set, as predictors of falls and hip fractures in Michigan nursing homes.** *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2005; 53(6): 955–62.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
108. Okamoto M, Rao SN, Aaronson LM, *et al.*: **Ethanol drug interaction with chlorthalidopoxide and pentobarbital.** *Alcohol Clin Exp Res.* 1985; 9(6): 516–21.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
109. By the American Geriatrics Society 2015 Beers Criteria Update Expert Panel: **American Geriatrics Society 2015 Updated Beers Criteria for Potentially Inappropriate Medication Use in Older Adults.** *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2015; 63(11): 2227–46.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
110. Kripke DF, Ancoli-Israel S, Klauber MR, *et al.*: **Prevalence of sleep-disordered breathing in ages 40-64 years: A population-based survey.** *Sleep.* 1997; 20(1): 65–76.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
111. Ancoli-Israel S, Kripke DF, Klauber MR, *et al.*: **Sleep-disordered breathing in community-dwelling elderly.** *Sleep.* 1991; 14(6): 486–95.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
112. Jann M, Kennedy WK, Lopez G: **Benzodiazepines: a major component in unintentional prescription drug overdoses with opioid analgesics.** *J Pharm Pract.* 2014; 27(1): 5–16.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
113. Webster LR, Choi Y, Desai H, *et al.*: **Sleep-disordered breathing and chronic opioid therapy.** *Pain Med.* 2008; 9(4): 425–32.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
114. Mogri M, Desai H, Webster L, *et al.*: **Hypoxemia in patients on chronic opiate therapy with and without sleep apnea.** *Sleep Breath.* 2009; 13(1): 49–57.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
115. Park TW, Saitz R, Ganoczy D, *et al.*: **Benzodiazepine prescribing patterns and deaths from drug overdose among US veterans receiving opioid analgesics: case-cohort study.** *BMJ.* 2015; 350: h2698.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
116. Weisberg DF, Gordon KS, Barry DT, *et al.*: **Long-term Prescription of Opioids and/or Benzodiazepines and Mortality Among HIV-Infected and Uninfected Patients.** *J Acquir Immune Defic Syndr.* 2015; 69(2): 223–33.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
117. Liang Y, Goros MW, Turner BJ: **Drug Overdose: Differing Risk Models for Women and Men among Opioid Users with Non-Cancer Pain.** *Pain Med.* 2016; pii: pnw071, in press.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
118. Dwyer LL, Lau DT, Shega JW: **Medications That Older Adults in Hospice Care in the United States Take, 2007.** *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2015; 63(11): 2282–9.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
119. Moore TJ: **ISMP Quarter Watch: Monitoring FDA MedWatch Reports.** Accessed 5-06-2015. Philadelphia, PA, ISMP. Quarter Watch.
[Reference Source](#)
120. Hampton LM, Daubresse M, Chang HY, *et al.*: **Emergency Department Visits**

- by Adults for Psychiatric Medication Adverse Events. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2014; 71(9): 1006–14.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
121. Dowell D, Haegerich TM, Chou R: **CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain--United States, 2016.** *JAMA*. 2016; 315(15): 1624–45.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 122. Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Halcion: **An Assessment of Data Adequacy and Confidence: Halcion: An Independent Assessment of Safety and Efficacy Data.** Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press; 1997.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 123. Harnod T, Wang YC, Kao CH: **Association Between Benzodiazepine Use and Epilepsy Occurrence: A Nationwide Population-Based Case-Control Study.** *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2015; 94(37): e1571.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
 124. Hammond EC: **Some preliminary findings on physical complaints from a prospective study of 1,064,004 men and women.** *Am J Public Health Nations Health*. 1964; 54(1): 11–23.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
 125. Kripke DF, Langer RD, Elliott JA, *et al.*: **Mortality related to actigraphic long and short sleep.** *Sleep Med*. 2011; 12(1): 28–33.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
 126. Kripke DF, Simons RN, Garfinkel L, *et al.*: **Short and long sleep and sleeping pills: Is increased mortality associated?** *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 1979; 36(1): 103–16.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 127. Buscemi N, Vandermeer B, Friesen C, *et al.*: **The efficacy and safety of drug treatments for chronic insomnia in adults: a meta-analysis of RCTs.** *J Gen Intern Med*. 2007; 22(9): 1335–50.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
 128. Farkas RH, Unger EF, Temple R: **Zolpidem and driving impairment--identifying persons at risk.** *N Engl J Med*. 2013; 369(8): 689–91.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 129. Rosenberg R, Caron J, Roth T, *et al.*: **An assessment of the efficacy and safety of eszopiclone in the treatment of transient insomnia in healthy adults.** *Sleep Med*. 2005; 6(1): 15–22.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 130. Scharf M, Erman M, Rosenberg R, *et al.*: **A 2-week efficacy and safety study of eszopiclone in elderly patients with primary insomnia.** *Sleep*. 2005; 28(6): 720–7.
[PubMed Abstract](#)
 131. Brasure M, MacDonald R, Fuchs E, *et al.*: **Management of Insomnia Disorder [Internet].** AHRQ Publication No. 15(16)-EHC027-EF, Accessed 12-30-2015. Rockville, MD, USA, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Comparative Effectiveness Review. 1–288.
[PubMed Abstract](#)
 132. Giles J: **Drug trials: stacking the deck.** *Nature*. 2006; 440(7082): 270–2.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 133. Mattila T, Stoyanova V, Elferink A, *et al.*: **Insomnia medication: do published studies reflect the complete picture of efficacy and safety?** *Eur Neuropsychopharmacol*. 2011; 21(7): 500–7.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 134. Boyle J, Groeger JA, Paska W, *et al.*: **A method to assess the dissipation of the [corrected] residual effects of [corrected] hypnotics: eszopiclone versus zopiclone.** *J Clin Psychopharmacol*. 2012; 32(5): 704–9.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 135. Kripke DF: **I petitioned the FDA to restrict hypnotics: here is why.** *Sleep Med*. in press, 2015. pii: S1389-9457(15)02088-2.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 136. Mellinger GD, Balter MB, Uhlenhuth EH: **Insomnia and its treatment. Prevalence and correlates.** *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 1985; 42(3): 225–32.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 137. Bertisch SM, Herzig SJ, Winkelman JW, *et al.*: **National use of prescription medications for insomnia: NHANES 1999-2010.** *Sleep*. 2014; 37(2): 343–9.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
 138. Zammit GK, McNabb LJ, Caron J, *et al.*: **Efficacy and safety of eszopiclone across 6-weeks of treatment for primary insomnia.** *Curr Med Res Opin*. 2004; 20(12): 1979–91.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 139. Schutte-Rodin S, Broch L, Buysse D, *et al.*: **Clinical guideline for the evaluation and management of chronic insomnia in adults.** *J Clin Sleep Med*. 2008; 4(5): 487–504.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Free Full Text](#)
 140. Carter BD, Abnet CC, Feskanich D, *et al.*: **Smoking and mortality--beyond established causes.** *N Engl J Med*. 2015; 372(7): 631–40.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 141. Tannenbaum C, Diaby V, Singh D, *et al.*: **Sedative-hypnotic medicines and falls in community-dwelling older adults: a cost-effectiveness (decision-tree) analysis from a US Medicare perspective.** *Drugs Aging*. 2015; 32(4): 305–14.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)
 142. Kripke DF: **When our body clocks run late: Does it make us depressed?** *Ann Transl Med*. In press, 2016.
[Reference Source](#)
 143. Qaseem A, Kansagara D, Forcica MA, *et al.*: **Management of Chronic Insomnia Disorder in Adults: A Clinical Practice Guideline From the American College of Physicians.** *Ann Intern Med*. in press, 2016; 165.
[PubMed Abstract](#) | [Publisher Full Text](#)

Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status:

Version 1

Reviewer Report 27 May 2016

<https://doi.org/10.5256/f1000research.9393.r14033>

© 2016 Phillips B. This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Barbara A. Phillips

Division of Pulmonary, Critical Care, and Sleep Medicine, Good Samaritan Hospital, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, USA

This report is important and over due, and most likely would not be published in a journal that accepts advertising from pharmaceutical companies. The author is careful NOT to confuse association with causation. References are complete and up-to-date.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 23 May 2016

<https://doi.org/10.5256/f1000research.9393.r13914>

© 2016 Siegel J. This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Jerome M. Siegel

Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, Brain Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, USA

This paper pulls together evidence from Dr. Kripke's own work and subsequent work, which indicate that the use of benzodiazepines and perhaps other sleeping pills is causing thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of deaths annually in the United States. He reviews the complete lack of evidence for any positive health effect of the use of these drugs. This is especially striking because drug companies sponsor a considerable amount of research on their sleeping pills and

would undoubtedly publicize any data indicating positive health or lifespan effects – but there do not appear to be any. Kripke also points out the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia. This well studied treatment is less expensive, without any known deleterious effects on lifespan or health and produces a long-lasting reduction in insomnia. The effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy in the treatment of insomnia contrasts with the miniscule (0-20 min) increase in sleep time produced by sleeping pills, followed by a considerable withdrawal effect if the patient stops taking the pills.

Minor suggestions include the following:

1. I would delete the discussion of Judge Scalia's death. Although it gets one's attention, without knowing what Scalia was taking and without any documentation of the cause of death, it does more harm than good to the impact of the paper.
2. On page 10, I would delete the paragraph on prescriptions without valid clinical indication. I guess that in many cases the prescribing physician would just say he forgot to document the need. I do not doubt that Dr. Kripke is bringing attention to an important issue, but it is not persuasively presented, in contrast to the rest of his argument.
3. Small typo under "Obesity and aging exacerbate hypnotic risks:" "can be attributed overdoses "

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Author Response 30 May 2016

Daniel F. Kripke, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, USA

The kind reviews and useful contributions from Dr. Siegel and Dr. Phillips are much appreciated.

Regarding the paragraph about the death certificate of Justice Scalia, debate about his cause of death and concern about the lack of autopsy received considerable press attention in major media in the United States. The process by which a rural judge decided what cause of death to record on the death certificate was uniquely well documented by the press. This illustrated how a death that could have been due to an overdose might not be explored and the overdose possibility might not be recorded. Knowing what the patient's primary doctor had or had not prescribed would not resolve the issue of what drugs were or were not taken. This paragraph was intended to exemplify how we may indeed lack adequate documentation of the real cause of death when the plausible possibility of death caused by a hypnotic is not acknowledged on a death certificate.

Regarding hypnotic prescriptions without a recorded diagnosis of insomnia, indeed the prescribing physician might just say that forgetting to document the insomnia was an oversight, but it is implausible that oversight is the explanation for such a large percentage

of total hypnotic prescriptions. If lack of indication is usually an oversight, where is the proof? When I was a medical student in the 1960's, I was trained that a hypnotic drug should be part of preprinted routine admission orders, and I have verified that routine admission orders for hypnotics are still preprinted in distinguished academic training hospitals in 2016. If we are training young doctors to prescribe a hypnotic without asking the patient whether that patient is experiencing trouble sleeping and without weighing the benefits and risks for the individual, it is plausible that habit persists in primary care. My impression is that prescribing doctors often do not ascertain that the patient has diagnostic criteria for insomnia, and in many cases, physicians know that the patient has no trouble sleeping. The physician might be trying to treat depression or to supplement opiates, but both uses are contraindicated. The physician might be treating some condition further afield such as hypertension or might be intentionally trying to achieve a placebo effect. There were studies documenting such practices several decades ago (references 126 and 136), but I know of no adequate study of 21st century U.S. outpatient hypnotic prescribing intentions. The manufacturers of both zolpidem and suvorexant have informed the FDA that the currently-FDA-mandated recommended doses are ineffective. It is tempting to infer that the FDA countenances the use of ineffective hypnotic doses as placebo implements of the bedside manner, without evidence that benefits outweigh risks of potentially addicting or lethal placebos.

Competing Interests: Please see disclosure in the article.

The benefits of publishing with F1000Research:

- Your article is published within days, with no editorial bias
- You can publish traditional articles, null/negative results, case reports, data notes and more
- The peer review process is transparent and collaborative
- Your article is indexed in PubMed after passing peer review
- Dedicated customer support at every stage

For pre-submission enquiries, contact research@f1000.com

F1000Research