



DEPARTMENT OF MOLECULAR & CELL BIOLOGY
DIVISION OF NEUROBIOLOGY

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Dear Members of the Sentencing Commission:

I wish to comment on the Sentencing Commission's pending consideration of the drug-equivalency status of "Ecstasy" (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine or MDMA). My understanding is that the Sentencing Commission does its best to use scientific standards in rating the seriousness of a drug for the purposes of determining drug equivalency.

Despite the illicit use of MDMA in nonmedical settings, which the Commission has been asked to address, MDMA has the potential for substantial medical benefit when used in therapeutic settings and it is anticipated that scientific and clinical research will go forth in this area. The DEA's own administrative law judge recommended the classification of MDMA as a Schedule III rather than a Schedule I substance following a series of hearings in the late 1980s.

My area of scientific expertise is the effects of drugs on the human brain. My area of clinical expertise is the treatment of drug addiction. I believe that to classify "Ecstasy" equivalent gram-for-gram in seriousness to heroin is very much in conflict with all scientific, clinical, and legal evidence. User populations, context of use, risk of addiction, and other potential problematic effects are far different from those of heroin. The effects of MDMA are more similar to those of mescaline, except that, gram-for-gram, MDMA is approximately 3 times more potent than mescaline. Thus the current drug-equivalency status for MDMA is an appropriate one, given the current system.

If I can provide further answers to your questions in this matter, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

David Presti, PhD
Professor of Neurobiology
Licensed Clinical Psychologist, specializing in the treatment of addiction