**Where does ketamine come from?**

*Anne-Marie Payne*

Ket is an entirely man-made drug. It's not generally produced illegally as it is too complicated to synthesise, and the chemicals needed to make it are not readily available. Instead, it is obtained from medical or veterinary sources, or brought in from countries where it's not a controlled substance. Before Indian authorities made ketamine harder to buy, much of Britain's ketamine arrived in the UK disguised as rose water. Now users and dealers are more likely to purchase small amounts over the internet.

Ketamine was first synthesised in 1962 by Dr Calvin Stevens of Wayne State University, who was researching alternatives to the anaesthetic phencyclidine (PCP or 'angel dust') which had fallen from favour in medical circles because of the unpredictable and often violent effect it had on behaviour. Stevens worked for Parke-Davis, (now Pfizer), which at the time was America's oldest and largest pharmaceutical company.

During the 1960s and early 1970s ketamine was heavily used on the battlefields of the Vietnam War and is still used in combat situations today. "It provides a strong analgesic, painkilling, effect without affecting the patient's breathing," says Professor Curran. "So it is useful in medical situations where it would be difficult to resuscitate the patient."

The Independent Drug Monitoring Unit reported that in 2007 there were around 90,000 ketamine users in the UK - a rise of 50% since the year 2000. A January 2009 report for Drugscope revealed that users are taking higher doses of the drug and more people are injecting the substance. According to Drugscope's 2008 Street Drug Trends Survey, the average price of a gram in the UK has fallen from £30 to £20 in the last three years.

Ketamine is currently a Class C drug, on the same level as cannabis. This means that it is illegal to possess or take the drug, and users risk a fine or prison sentence if they are caught with it.