

## *Guest Editorial*

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### **Postal Stamps on Drug and Alcohol Abuse**

Philately, the world of postal stamps, has been a prolonged and diversified historical tradition, supplying a rich source of information. It is sometimes thought that stamps are released only on subjects like art, culture, religion and great personalities. Stamps also cover distinct fields of education such as Medicine, Zoology, Botany, Geology, Engineering and many other themes. Stamps related to medicine propagate the health policies and targets, defined mainly by World Health Organization (WHO). The postal departments of many countries issue postal stationery to commemorate medical events and thus make known the history of medicine to future generations (1).

Recent past has shown us that many of the diseases widespread in both developing and developed countries have their roots in factors that human beings themselves have created and can control. At an international gathering in Helsinki in 1990, "Inter-health" was born. Inter-health fights the diseases born out of various lifestyles. Among them heart attacks, hypertension, cancer, pulmonary diseases, diabetes, osteoporosis and nutritional disorders are more prevalent. These diseases, often called "diseases of civilization", are different from communicable diseases, in that a single bad habit like improper diet, tobacco smoking, drug and alcohol abuse or lack of exercise entails multiple risks to health (2).

Properly used under medical guidance, certain drugs may cure diseases. But misuse of drugs is a disease in itself. An individual might start on drugs to alleviate trauma, relieve pain, reduce tension and stress, or for no reason at all. Addiction is a one way ticket. Once one enters the world of drugs, there is no return from it (3). One of the important steps to curb this menace is to launch Drug Awareness Programmes in the community. The International Day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking (June 26) and Postal stamps can play a vital role in this programme as they can disseminate a message, worldwide.

The governments of many countries have issued postage stamps to highlight the vital need to give up drugs. India issued a beautiful stamp of Rs. 5 denomination in 1991 warning "Beware of drugs". "Prevent drug abuse" is the theme of USA stamp which is in the denomination of 8 Cents. "Drugs kill life" is the message of an Italian stamp. Philippines issued a set of 4

stamps on the theme "Fight drug abuse" in denominations of 30 S, 40 S, 90 S and 1.05 P. "Eradicate narcotics" is inscribed on a Re. 1 stamp from Pakistan. Malaysia, on the 10th anniversary of its National Association for the Prevention of Drugs issued a stamp, "Stay free from Drug", in the denomination of 40 Cents. (Fig. 1).

On December 29, 1988, the Islamabad declaration of the SAARC Summit highlighted 1989 as the SAARC Year Against Drug Abuse—Society's menace" and to commemorate "1989 SAARC Year Against Narcotics", Pakistan post office issued a stamp of Rs. 7 denomination in December



Fig. 1

The General Postal Authority in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) issued a set of two stamps, "Say yes to life-no to drugs" in denominations of 50 Fils and 3 Dhs (4). In collaboration with the other government organisations, the General Postal Authority of UAE participated in the Campaign, "No Drugs", against drug abuse by issuing another set of special stamps (5).

1989 (6). The last decade of this millennium (1991–2000 AD) is the UN decade against drugs. To commemorate this decade, Bangladesh issued a pair of very impressive stamps in denominations of Rs. 2 and 4 (Fig. 2).

*Papaver somniferum*, the opium poppy, bears large white flowers and white seeds



Fig. 2

called *Khashkhash*. The poppy capsules are called *Postdoda*. The capsules have been employed in the preparation of soporific drugs or in the preparation of stimulating and soothing beverages from times immemorial (7). The opium poppy was shown as part of a set of medicinal plants in a stamp issued by East Germany in 1960 (8). Yugoslavia also issued a stamp on the same plant (Fig. 3).

Alcohol, like chloroform and ether, is a depressant, a narcotic, a protoplasmic poison that reduces the efficiency of every tissue of the body that it comes in contact with (9). Several stamps have been issued on alcoholism, with very appealing slogans. One stamp in the denomination of 80 M issued by Germany, which conveys the

message "No alcohol in any public conveyance" is worthy of praised. Australia issued a series of stamps on Community Medicine. One stamp in the denomination of 41 Cents value belonging to this series

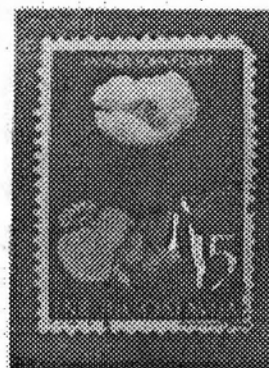


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

carries the message "Drinking and driving don't mix" (Fig. 4). Many Indian postcards, envelopes and postmarks carry slogans such as, "Addiction-A funeral pyre", "The consequence of addiction is death and "The world of addiction is full of misery and darkness" (Fig. 5).

Abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances has emerged as the most serious problem in the present century. Postal stamps, can play a vital role in spreading the messages on drug abuse and its ill-effects worldwide.



Fig. 5

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