

121five Exclusive: Cialis® Not “Cure for Hypoxia,” Study’s Author Says

Over-enthusiasm in non-scientific press doesn’t make it so

[Editor’s Note: *Regardless what you’ve read in the non-scientific press, this entire story has gotten overblown and out of hand; claims made by journalists (not the study’s authors) are generally overstated. We thank one of the actual study’s actual authors for setting the hype straight.*]

Hold your horses - or at least your Viagra®...!

As one of the authors on the abstract which has started this ball rolling, I would like to set the record straight from the "get-go."

This has been quite a remarkable case of journalistic hype and a classical case of "let's not confuse the issue with facts," not to mention "why bother with checking the source?" Once the first reporter (a "cub" reporter for a local military weekly) had misinterpreted the abstract and put a titillating headline on it (to appeal to the young readership) all the others picked it up and each one embellished it further without bothering to refer to the source.

The facts:

Tadalafil (Cialis®) is, like Viagra, a potent phosphodiesterase inhibitor and has been shown to improve exercise performance under hypoxic conditions, probably due to the pulmonary vasodilatory effect which counters some of the pulmonary vasoconstriction seen in hypoxia.

We found that in a group of climbers climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro (5895m -- 19340' for those not metricized as yet) the group receiving Cialis had a lower Lake Louise AMS score at altitude than a similar group climbing together with them but without Cialis.

That is the story! For the record and the sake of accuracy the other authors on the abstract are: E. Rosenberg, E. Leshem, H. Hermesh, E. Schwartz. This was a preliminary study on a small group, not blinded, and there are quite a few question-marks that one can raise, such as a placebo effect, etc.

Now the hype: as this abstract is due for presentation at an Israeli Air Force aviation medicine meeting [Feb 12, 2008], it was included in the "abstract book " and picked up by the journalist. She decided that as this is the air force and that as far as she is concerned "altitude is altitude" and "hypoxia is hypoxia" and that mountain climbing is the same as flying - what's the difference, so she wrote it up and decided that the air force is going to give Viagra to all the pilots (as mentioned, it gave "rise" to a lot of puns - pun intended!). This was picked up by a mass circulation paper which embellished the story further and the rest, as they say, is history. All I can say is that the phone has not stopped ringing since then and the reporters, when told the truth, feel rather "deflated." (I prescribed Viagra for that condition...)

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