

J&J neuro R&D head uses street drug to treat depression

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Singapore: Johnson & Johnson (J&J) is contemplating the thought of treating depression using popular street drug ketamine, in what is being viewed as a major breakthrough in psychiatry.

Dr Husseini Manji, who was formerly part of a team that learned that a particular brain receptor called N-methyl D-aspartate (NMDA) played a crucial role in depression, is presently heading the neuroscience R&D unit of Johnson & Johnson. Following Dr Manji's research, it became apparent that ketamine could target the receptor and ease the symptoms of depression and even suicidal thoughts.

His research showed that ketamine had a positive effect on 70 percent of patients just a day after they were injected with the drug. By comparison, currently available antidepressants take weeks to produce actual results and even then they have a much lower success rate, about 30 percent.

Dr Manji revealed that standard procedure in serious cases of depression involves locking people up to keep them from harming themselves until the drugs kick in. Dr Manji feels that ketamine could be used to develop other drugs, which could be available by 2017, without the negative image and dangers associated with ketamine.