

TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN

By Dr Jon Stamford

I don't know if it's just me but there does seem to be an awful lot of gambling websites these days advertising on television. I get the impression that the law has changed in this area because I don't recall gambling being a suitable product for advertising previously. Now almost every other advert seems to be for online gambling in one form or another.



The number of ways in which one can gamble seems also to have changed substantially. It's a far cry from the days when my granny used to send me down to the betting shop with a half crown and instructions to put it each way on Knackersyard in the 2:30 at Wetherby. The last of the big spenders, my grandmother!

Nowadays more betting seems to take place on matters incidental to the result. Whereas beforehand you might place a wager on whether Aston Villa would beat Everton for instance, and be offered odds appropriately, nowadays the result is almost superfluous. You can bet on when the first goal will be scored, the number of corners in the match, the identity of the first person to be sent off and even, for all I know, the name of the referee's secret lover in Droitwich. And if you feel that you have placed an ill considered wager on the result of a game, you can still get much of your money back by cashing out. The bookies will apparently refund you a proportion of your stake. I don't recall that deal being on offer with Charlie Biggs, the Neanderthal bully of 5C, who seamlessly went from the petty crime of school to the wider world of pubs and clubs. The last I heard he was doing ten for armed robbery.

But more than any of this, what gets my goat is the final disclaimer on each advertisement, encouraging people to "gamble responsibly". Are we to believe that a certain level of gambling is a responsible act? Because that's what the sentence seems to imply – that there is responsible and irresponsible gambling. This is newspeak, this assertion that there is a type of gambling which is responsible. In what way?

Let's put aside the fanciful notion that anybody actually wins in the long term. As anybody with a scientific background will tell you, gambling is simply a tax on people who are bad at maths. You gamble, you lose. That's the equation. If bookies lost

money, they would not exist. These are not philanthropic organisations. So let's rid ourselves of this notion that gambling is in any way a responsible act. It isn't.

And when it comes to Parkinson's, don't get me started. We Parkies need gambling websites like a hole in the head. Especially those of us taking dopamine agonists. As is increasingly recognised, there is a strong link between these drugs and impulse control disorders – that's hypersexuality, gambling and spending among other things.

Parkies taking agonists are likely to gamble more than the general population. In the past, when gambling opportunities were more limited and involved at the very least a walk to the local bookies, the opportunities were much less widely available. But the advent of the Internet (and it seems funny to use the word advent for something that feels as though it's been around forever) has opened up endless opportunities for covert gambling. You don't even have to leave the comfort of your laptop in order to empty your bank account.

This is not progress. Allowing gambling websites to make the process of gambling seem fun and normal would be tantamount to removing the health warning on packets of cigarettes. It matters that much. At least cigarettes will only kill the smoker. Gambling kills the entire family. Television advertising only encourages gambling. And for the average Parky, that's like handing them a loaded gun. Somebody is going to get hurt.