



European Monitoring Centre  
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

# Trendspotting in Europe: using mixed methods to explore new developments in internet drug markets

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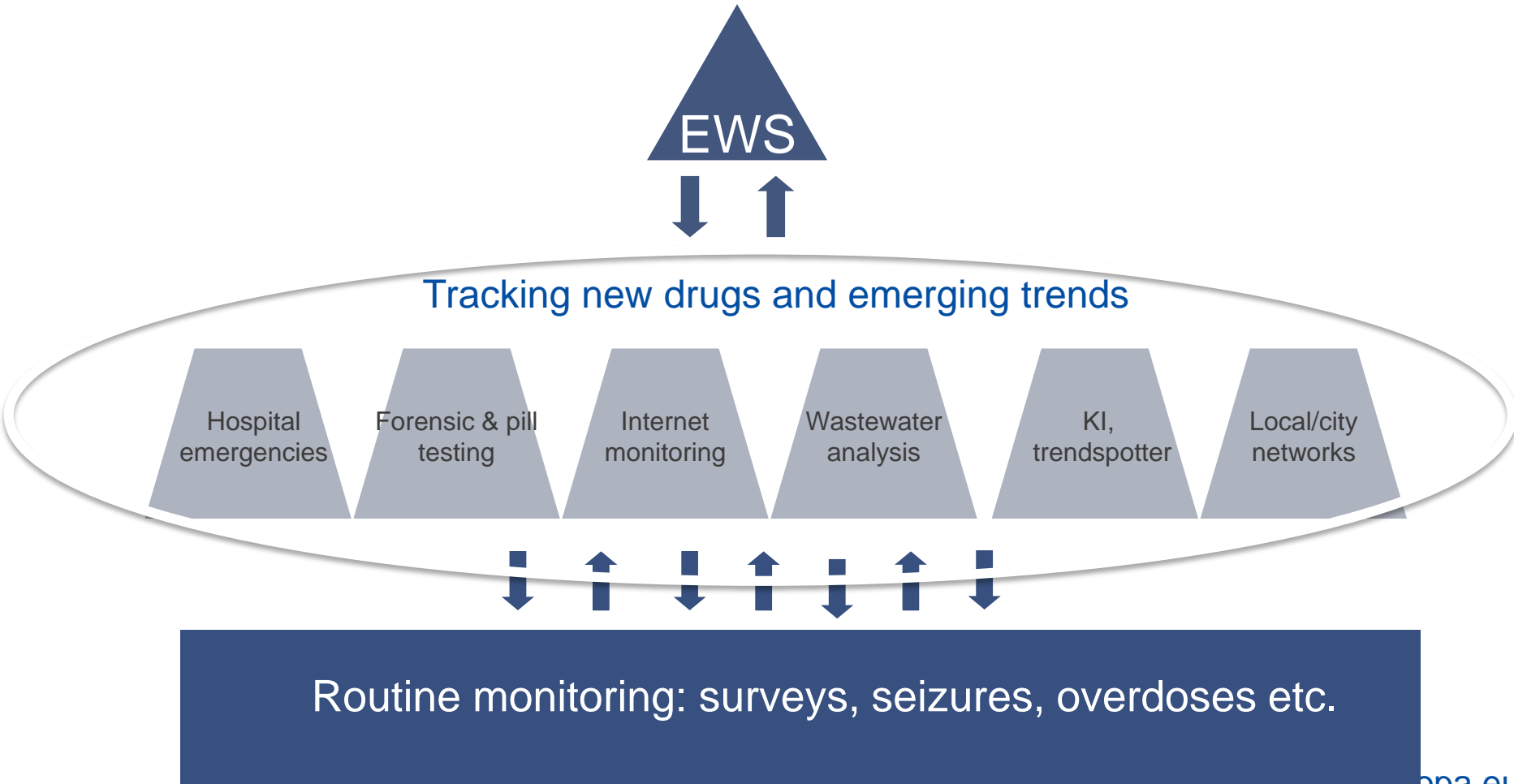
# Monitoring challenges

- Rapidly changing, globalised drug market
- Reliability of monitoring instruments
- Challenge of timeliness

But ... new tools in the epidemiological toolkit:

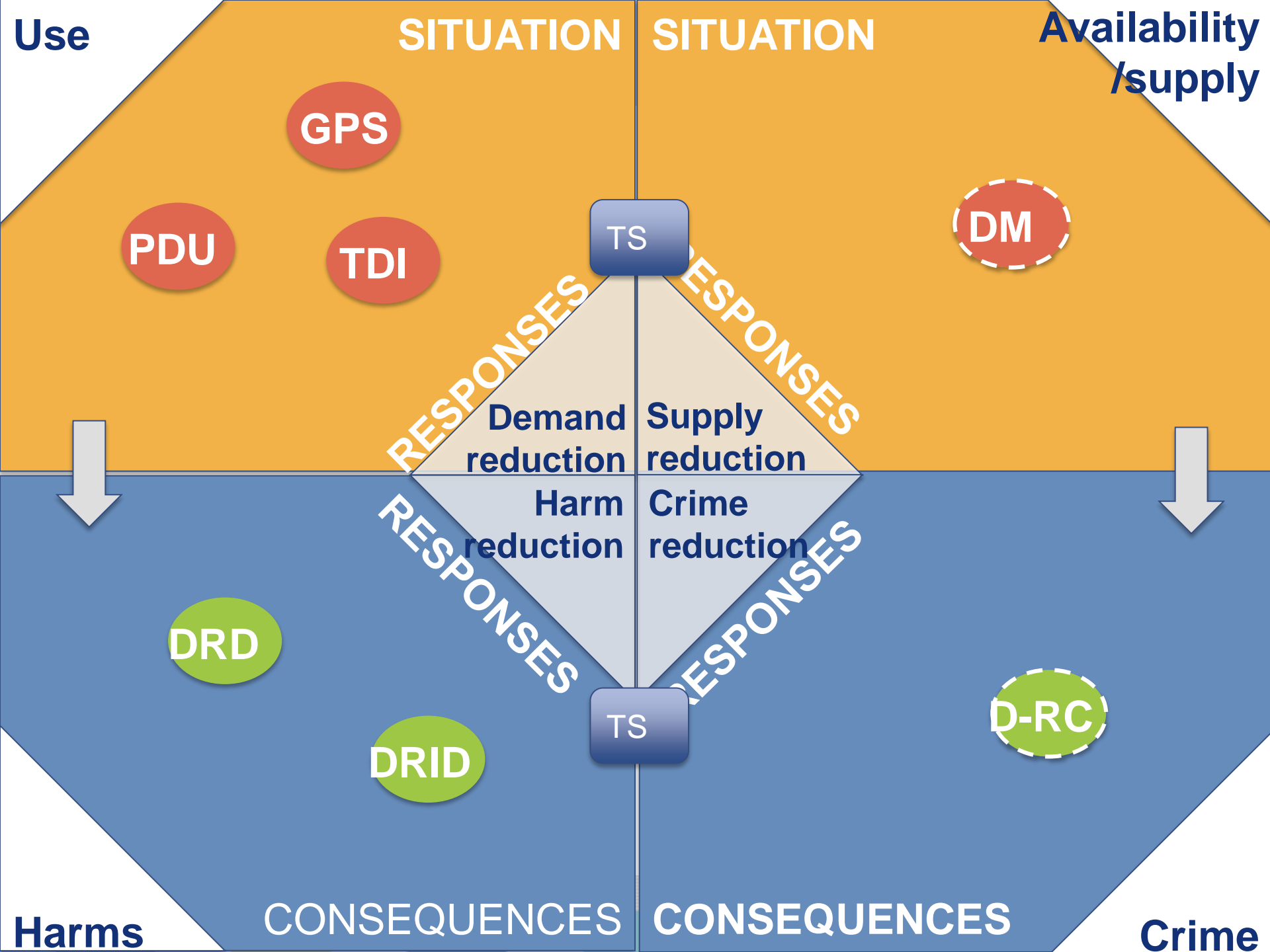
- Complement and sensitise existing monitoring

# New tools in the epidemiological toolkit



# Rapid Information assessments – ‘trendspotter studies’ - role in drug monitoring

- Sits here on the monitoring paradigm ...





# Trendspotter methodology

Draws on mixed methods approaches  
+ rapid assessment methodologies

Multi-source, multi-method, triangulation:

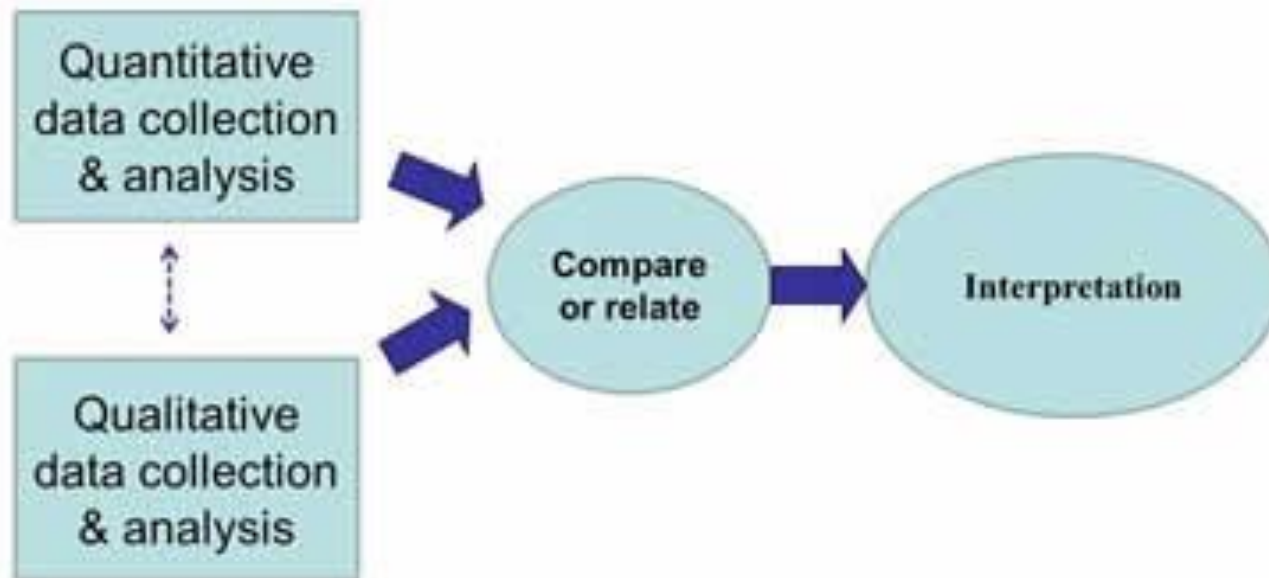
- Literature and data review
- Electronic surveys
- Expert presentations
- Focus groups
- Social media

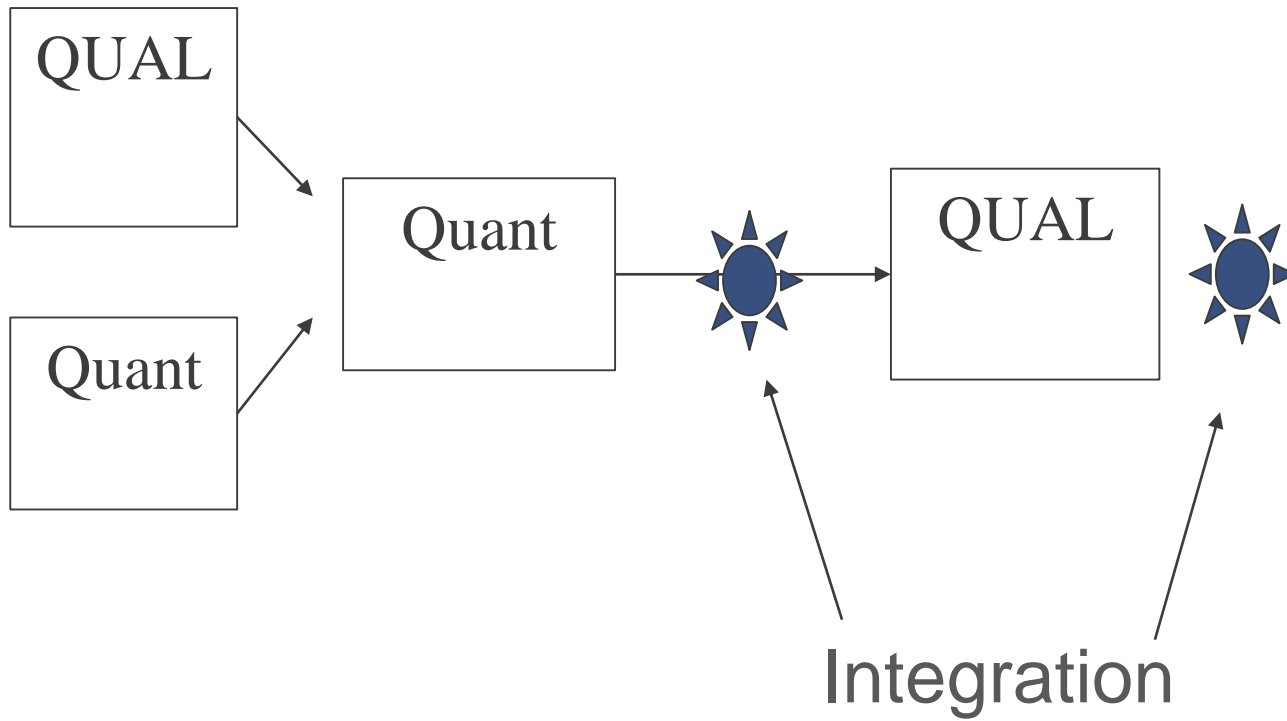
# Mixed methods

- Paradigm – pragmatism
- Data collection strategy– what is required to address research question
- Design – triangulation, convergence model
  - *Creswell & Plano Clark (2007); Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003)*



## Convergent Mixed Methods Design





# Trendspotter study process

## Preparation

EMCDDA data collection, literature review

Electronic survey  
Network survey

## Meeting

Expert presentations x15 & EMCDDA

Focus/  
discussion  
groups

## Post meeting



Report

ANALYSIS

# Triangulation of data, methods, investigators for..

Confirmation



Completeness



# Choice of topic

- Response to signals
- Suggest a significant emerging trend
- An area of uncertainty
- A gap in our monitoring
- A multi-country issue



2011: Heroin shortages in Europe

2012: Fentanyl outbreaks in Europe

2013: Methamphetamine: availability, use and harms

2014: Internet and drug markets

2015: MDMA market changes

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Grid of drug images:

- Dom Perignon
- Facebook
- Chupa Chups
- Paul Frank
- \$100 bill
- Grenades
- Gold bars
- White skull
- Red Devil Logo
- Two small images of pills

# IDM study objectives

To increase understanding of the **online supply of drugs** and undertake a mapping of the **range of internet drug markets** in existence.

- Surface web
  - The role of social media and apps
  - Online sale of NPS
  - Online sales of medicinal products for illicit use
- Sale of drugs on the deep web

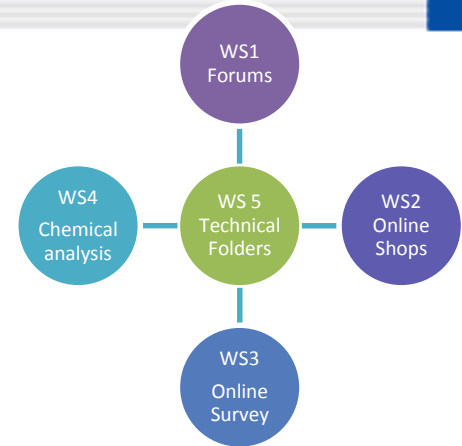
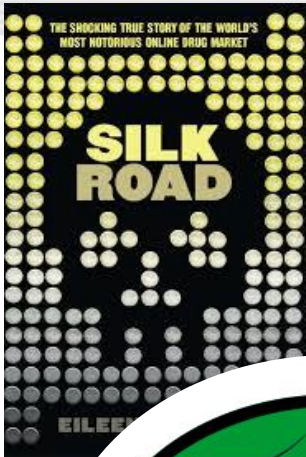
# IDM study methods

- Literature review
- Electronic survey
- Key informant ppts
- Focus groups





# Participating experts



# Results

- A range of internet markets, nps, online pharmacies, DNM
- Interconnected markets (with surface-grey, with apps)
- New breed of drug dealer
- Glocal communities (MSM and growth in sex drugs apps, Silk Rd)
- Increasing uncertainty due to police and scams.
- Decentralisation, increasingly sophisticated security, encryption, multi key escrow, peer to peer





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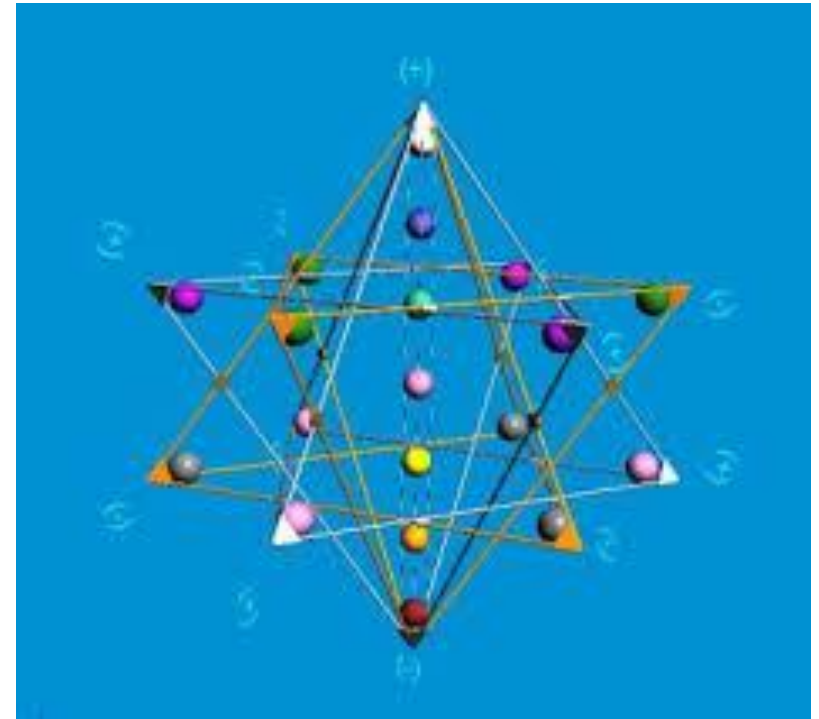
# Limitations of the approach



- Scarcity of data
- Dependent on weak data
- Reliant on quality of experts
- One off snapshot
- Spotlight, but not repeated

# Strengths

- Fill knowledge gaps
- Benefit of timeliness and sensitivity
- Rich analysis – multi dimensional
- Can address quantitative issues - how many, where, when?
- Also qualitative issues – how, what?



# TS role in drug monitoring

- Complementary to monitoring
- Explore an issue raised by monitoring
- Incorporates monitoring data
- In depth exploration of a topic
- Adds a qualitative, human component

# Next steps

- NPS PDU study in October
- Developing a manual
- Online trendspotter network