

Episode 50: One Year of The Tox Lab - Reflections, Updates, and What's Next

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Transcript

I'm Rebecca. I'm Rob. This week's a very very special episode. It marks our 50th episode which is really really exciting and coincidentally a whole one year of The Tox Lab.

I don't think I quite believe that we've been going a whole year. Yeah I agree. It's been a journey hasn't it? I can't believe it's been a year.

It doesn't feel like a year. No it doesn't. But I've checked the calendar and it is actually a year. I thought this week we could really have a bit of a reflection on where we've come, where we've been and maybe have a look at some of the topics we've covered over the last year and see if there's any updates and then maybe have a look at where we're going in the future.

Before we dive into today's episode if you want to stay up to date with our content you can find us on Instagram at [@the_tox_lab](#). We also have a page on LinkedIn and we're fairly active on there and for those of you who don't use social media but still want to get in touch with comments about our episodes or episode suggestions you can email us at thetoxlab@gmail.com. So where do we start? Should we start right at the start?

I think that's it. How did this all begin? It started off as a vague idea down the pub didn't it? Yeah.

Two or three drinks in let's start a podcast and we sat on that for what two months? At least I think yeah. Yeah before we finally decided let's give it a go and it just feels like a distant memory doesn't it like huddled recording on a mobile phone yeah in your laundry room that was like 35 degrees. Desperately trying to see if we can make this work.

We weren't even trying we were just seeing what we did worked and kind of went from there didn't it? We got the mics, we got an office. Yes lots of learning curves with sound. So many learning curves with sound.

So many editing errors that I mean our early episodes the sound quality is awful but what you don't see is the number of times I had to learn the lesson always save your work. Oh yeah. The number of times I was editing and lost what I had done and had to go back and redo it all or try and salvage what we had and yeah. So that's been a good learning experience actually I'm definitely much more confident at editing.

I'm very glad you do the editing because I don't think I've got the patience for it. That's fair enough. If you could go back and rerecord or redo one of our early episodes which one would you pick and why? It's a good question isn't it?

I'm not sure definitely some of those earlier episodes if we were to do them again I think would be different but also because we talk so much about current stuff actually things have probably moved on since then so we'd never redo them apart from some of our historical ones maybe. Yeah. So maybe Tusco. Should we give Tusco another go?

I could do. I actually quite enjoyed Tusco. Tusco was a good one to do. I enjoyed that one.

Is there ever anything you've said that made the final cut that you now regret saying? Oh I don't think so. To be honest if I went and listened back to all of them there probably is something that I've said that I would want to change like the wording or the phrasing on but nothing springs to mind which I'm gonna take as a good thing. Yeah I did consider going back actually and having a listen and I couldn't bring myself to do it.

Have you done the maths? I haven't worked it out but we're well over 20 hours of content aren't we? Easily. Yeah.

I mean 50 episodes kind of averaging. 20-25. Yeah. Many many hours.

Many hours. So no I'm not gonna go back and listen to all that. People do. I appreciate the fact that every so often somebody downloads the entire back catalogue.

I really like that. Yeah one of my friends has caught up and finally listened from beginning up to where we are now which I'm really grateful for. Shout out Tali. One thing I did say that regret is a strong word but I get made fun of incessantly about.

I'm gonna play you the clip. Okay. EUDA drug report day. Bit like Christmas Rebecca.

No. I forgot that was my favourite. I'm not surprised you get made fun of for that. It was memed.

It was turned into a Winnie the Pooh voice clip that the amount of ribbing I got from my friends for that one comment. I stand by it. I still think EUDA drug report day is a little bit like Christmas even if you don't. Yeah.

What were some of the biggest highlights of the last year doing the Tox Lab? Oh that's a good question. There are too many I think to try and do it now. All right top three.

Top three highlights. I think my biggest one has got to be whenever anyone gets in contact or comes up to us at conferences and lets us know they're really enjoying the content. They're finding it really useful. I think that just highlights why we're doing it and kind of puts it into perspective because it is quite I don't know podcasting can be a little bit lonely sometimes because we're just talking at each other and putting it out there and we don't always know what people think and whether people like the episode or not so.

Yeah that's true actually. Feedback's really good. I think for me two big highlights that come to mind. The first was our trip to Nottingham Trent which was wonderful.

Yes. You know to shout out to Muriel and all of her colleagues who invited us up there to talk to the students literally off the back of finding our podcasts on the internet and that was really really cool. And that was back in like the early days where the audio wasn't great and we were still finding our feet so yeah definitely appreciate that one. Definitely that was really good and the other one I think for me was when we were at that London toxicology group meeting and we got a random shout out from Laura.

Yeah. Who didn't know who we were and didn't realize that we were sat behind her. That was the moment I think where it was like okay people are actually listening to this. Yeah yeah shout out to Laura.

Any other highlights? I mean I think one of my favorite episodes to record was when we slightly selfishly covered our own papers and did an it seems tablet episode I really enjoyed doing that so that's definitely up there as one of my favorites. What's your favorite episode that we've done? It's hard to say actually some of our more recent episodes I've really got into.

I feel like we're really starting to find our voice a bit. Yeah. So the mushroom episode recently I really really enjoyed that. That was really good.

It's hard to pick a favorite. I've definitely had episodes that were not my favorite in terms of recording. Yeah. But actually sometimes they come out okay and you realize that actually even if it felt like an uphill struggle during the recording it's actually still not bad.

Yeah that's what happens when you record after work on a Friday when it's been a very long week. Yeah that's true. Completely lacking energy. Yeah.

Do you still get nervous before recording? No. No I feel all right. I think what about you?

I'm not sure I was ever nervous. No that's just who you are though. So out of all our episodes which episode has surprised you the most? So either in terms of the listens and engagement we've got out of it or how different it turned out from the plan you had originally.

Oh that's a tough question. I don't know if I've got an answer to this one. Was there an episode that the engagement was very surprising? I mean there's been episodes that have had lots of listens really quickly that wasn't necessarily expecting.

Such as? Clozapine. Yeah. That one I think got more traction than I initially thought it would.

Yeah that's fair. What was your favorite intro or banter section? I quite like the quizzes to be fair. Do you?

Yeah from mushrooms and then our ozone pickup stuff. Yeah they're quite fun to do. And we can work on some more of those. What about you if you've got a favorite banter section?

As the leader of the banter. I'm glad we've moved past those dad jokes of the early days. Yeah they were really really awkward. I ran out of ability to write those quite quickly.

What compound or case that we've talked about still surprises you and you want to think more and hard about and maybe cover in more detail. Ooh. I think out of all of them it would have been the bromism case from our toxicology mysteries episode. I think that was really surprising and just a really weird one.

Yeah. Yeah definitely. That was a really strange case wasn't it? And actually that whole episode of looking at weird case reports.

Actually I did really enjoy that and we might have to revisit that again. See whether we can find some more more unusual cases out there. I'm sure there's loads. What's the most unexpected message or feedback we've received?

I think we've only received one piece of negative feedback. Yeah and that was someone who was listening to I think our second episode where the audio was shocking. Oh really bad. Yeah really bad.

And that was their main problem with it was that the audio I'm like please listen to our like most recent ones it gets so much better. The audio quality was bad and also you didn't believe what you said. Yeah that was the comment wasn't it? I mean any time anyone reaches out either like on socials or in the comment section on Spotify I do do a little like happy dance when people enjoy our content and have feedback and things for us.

So please keep that coming. Yeah definitely definitely. Oh that was a good moment that we haven't mentioned. Of course where Peter from the Tox Pod reached out.

Yeah. And gave us some real encouragement early on. Yeah and that was really really sweet. Which I really appreciated.

If you haven't already go and check out the Tox Pod. So as the editor of the podcast what's the hardest thing about doing the editing and which one of us do you have to edit out more? I think the hardest thing about the editing early on was learning workflow and learning editing. That was the biggest challenge.

I had to get lessons from my friend Stephen in how compression works because I just couldn't get my head around it. Now I understand it I think. Now I've got an established workflow and I've got things set up. It's not as bad as it was.

The challenge actually is trying to get like the flow because it's remarkable how much space gets left between words and sentences sometimes. But in terms of who I have to edit out the most the number of ums and r's I have to edit out from you. Overwhelmingly you compared to me. Is it getting better though?

It is getting better. It was really bad in the early days but I feel like it's definitely not as bad now. No you're definitely a lot more confident now. It's definitely a lot better actually.

Good. All right I've got some sillier questions. Okay go for it. If they made the Tox Lab the movie who would play us?

I don't know. I've never thought about who I'd want to play me in a movie. I'm sure you have. Patrick Stewart because he's got a great voice.

He does have a good voice yeah. And what's the nerdiest thing we've ever said on mic? But there's too many things to count. Right.

I mean it is a relatively nerdy podcast. We are properly nerdy. So we're going to talk a little bit about updates on common themes in a minute. But what themes do you think really define our first year?

I mean we've covered a lot on like novel opioids. It's definitely a big one. Contaminants in drug supplies. That's been a very big theme with xylazine, medetomidine, BTMPS.

Yeah I think there's really been three common emerging themes amongst all of the noise hasn't there? As you say novel opioids, drug contaminants, chemically modified drugs being sold in places you wouldn't expect them. So smoke shop, delta-8 products, mitragynine products. And another theme I guess is children eating things they shouldn't.

Yes yeah that seems to be a recurring one. Which is a recurring theme in a lot of the sort of accidental poisonings. Why don't we dive into some stats? So as of today we've reached four thousand five hundred fifty six streams and downloads across all our episodes.

And we've also had eight hundred and sixty nine views on youtube. So that puts us over five thousand. Which is really exciting. I don't think when we started this I thought we'd ever reach five thousand views, listens, streams.

I remember those really early days where we'd have like eight listens in a week and I think that was successful. Yeah we used to get so excited then when we hit like 50 listens a week it was like the best thing ever. What's our demographics? So across all podcasting platforms we are currently being listened to in 57 different countries around the world.

That's exciting. Top ones obviously the UK, the US, Chile, Australia, Canada. We've also got listeners in Thailand, in Pakistan, in Albania. It's amazing isn't it?

Just how much reach there is. And we did have one surprising statistic didn't we? That for a brief week for some reason we were top 15 science podcast in Finland. Yeah that got us excited for a little bit didn't it?

I don't quite know how that happened but quite nice to have broken into the top 20 science podcasts so shout out to our listeners in Finland. Yeah across Spotify we're currently being followed by 241 people. On Apple Podcast we have 83 followers so if you aren't following but are listening regularly please hit that follow button we'd really appreciate it. Yeah definitely that'd be really good.

And if you are following share us with your friends. Let's get word out there, let's get this bigger. So why don't we have a look at some of those themes and see if there's any updates because there's a few things where there's been some developments on the subject but probably not enough to justify a full episode. Where should we start?

nitazenes I guess a novel opioids really really big theme that's occurred over the last 12 months. The latest I've seen on this is that they're still around, they're still here. They seem to move around the world so Australia seems to be particularly affected at the moment and the US seems to be seeing a few cases. They certainly don't appear to be going away although China has now enacted a generic ban so maybe we will see some shifts but that was a few months ago now wasn't it?

Yeah and they've not. They've not really gone away. Other novel opioids are still around as well. I saw Carl Fentonill back in the news again.

I don't think we've really talked about Carl Fentonill because it hasn't been too high on our radar but that is one we could maybe talk about in the future as a drug that seems to disappear and reappear. Yeah and there's been a lot of chatter about orphines as well so maybe they'll be up and coming and take over nitazenes. We'll do an episode on orphines very soon.

So we covered bromazlan back at the very beginning in episode 4 which I think would be the one episode I'd want to re-record purely because of the audio quality on the episode and since recording that on the 3rd of December 2024 bromazlan was added to schedule 4 of the convention of psychotropic substances 1971 and since then in our casework at least we've seen a bit of a drop off in bromazlan. I don't know whether anyone else is seeing the same sort of trend but yeah I'd love to hear your thoughts on whether you're also not seeing bromazlan as much and what other novel benzos are kind of filling that gap in the market.

Yeah we don't really seem to have seen any one novel benzo take its place to quite the same degree that bromazlan had. bromazlan was so prevalent. Yeah I know there's a lot of chatter about possibly ethyl bromazlan filling that gap but I've not really seen that happen yet so it's definitely a space to watch out for. Yeah yeah definitely. Ketamine was a big one and that's sort of been an emerging up and coming theme hasn't it we've talked about that a few times.

Again not going away there was recent call for evidence from the ACMD and our colleagues at MP some have also recently published an update haven't they looking at deaths associated with ketamine in the UK. And there has been a bit of a change in demographics hasn't there we can put a little link in the paper below but really it does look like there have been some trends and some changes more towards a poly drug use picture which is actually another emerging trend that we've talked a lot about on this podcast isn't it poly drug use people use a lot of different drugs at the same time.

I'm not sure where ketamine is going to go over these next 12 months I know they are talking about reclassification I guess all we can do is watch the space and see what happens. Yeah methanol was another topic we covered back in the early days specifically around the methanol poisonings happening in Laos and currently Brazil seem to be experiencing a methanol poisoning crisis and

according to CNN as of the 8th October this year Brazil's health ministry has logged 159 suspected cases of methanol poisoning nationwide and five confirmed deaths as a result.

Yeah I mean that's another subject that actually never really goes away does it it made the headlines back when we covered it but it seems that it is a trend that continues on a regular basis. Probably one of our more surprising episodes that we covered and there's been some updates on now is the slushies and the glycerol. We'll go back in January episode 12. Episode 12 we covered slushy poisonings and again I think some more updated guidance has come out pushing the recommended age for slushies even higher now.

Yeah so on the 19th of June the food standards agency here in the UK announced guidance that glycerol containing ice drinks are not suitable for children under the age of seven. Well that makes me really sad because that is the prime age where you enjoy slushies once you become a grown-up. The appeal kind of goes. Definitely yeah.

So why don't we move towards now looking at the future. What is the future of the Tox Lab? Well we've got a few exciting things coming up haven't we? We've got some potential international partnerships which I'm not going to say too much on but I'm excited about.

We might have possibly a semi-permanent recording studio. Yes fingers crossed. In the near future which is really really exciting and as it stands I've got no shortage of things we want to talk about. No the list just keeps growing and growing and growing.

So yeah I'm excited for the future definitely. What sort of topics do you think you'd like to cover in the future? I quite like the idea of covering a little bit more not loads but a little bit more TOX true crime stuff like we did with Harold Chipman. I really enjoyed doing that episode and planning that one out so a sprinkling of that in the future would be quite nice.

We can definitely do some of that yeah we can definitely do some of that. I think the feedback we've had generally is that people like it when we do new stuff stuff that's current and cutting edge so in general I think that will be our trend won't it towards current research upcoming data and sometimes we can't predict what's going to get published can we you know the number of times we've seen a paper come out and go oh that's interesting let's talk about that. Yeah. I'd like to have a good look at cannabis properly.

Yes. I think there's a lot to talk about there. But yeah to you guys who are listening, if you have topics that you want us to cover with cases you've seen in your work and you'd like us to deep dive on that topic, please keep the suggestions coming so feel free to send them to our email, which is thetoxlab@gmail.com, or message us or comment on any of our platforms. Yeah definitely.

If there is stuff out there that isn't on our radar but it is on yours and you want us to have a chat about we would really appreciate the contact and we just love chatting to our people as well don't we we love chatting to fans. It's great. So yeah definitely do get in touch. We're hoping we might have some guests on the show in the future as well.

Yes. I've definitely got two or three people I'd like to get on to have a chat about their areas because I think it'd be really good actually to get a few different voices on and get some different thoughts so that would be really good and there might possibly be an opportunity for you guys to get your hands on some very special Tox Lab merch. Well I think we're going to wrap up our birthday episode here. I want to give you all absolutely massive thank you for listening to us.

We really appreciate the feedback that you give us. If you've enjoyed listening today over the last year do consider sharing amongst your network. We've got a really really big following amongst

toxicologists which is brilliant but I think there's wider appeal and I think if you can share it with people who might be interested but maybe don't quite work in the field I think that would be really really good because we'd really like to reach as many people who will be interested as possible. But yeah massive thank you all for listening.

We really appreciate the fact that we're still here a year later. Yeah we wouldn't be here without you guys. 100% yeah 100%. We're still smiling, we're still enjoying it and it's thanks to you so yeah thank you very much.

I'd really love if you could take a couple of minutes just to drop your favourite episodes that we've done last year in the comments because I'd just really love to see what is the most popular and then we can help target future episodes to what you guys like. Hope you all have an amazing week and we'll see you next time. Bye!