

Petition P-05-784 about Recognition and Support iro Prescription Drug Dependence and Withdrawal

Recommendation	Lead
<p>Recommendation 1. Greater recognition should be given to prescription drug dependence at a national level in both policy and strategy, including within the next Substance Misuse Action Plan and the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework</p>	<p>Research on this issue was completed in 2019 the report can be found here <u>a-qualitative-study-of-the-misuse-and-diversion-of-prescription-only-and-over-the-counter-medication.pdf</u> . Following this the report was widely disseminated and areas were asked to look at findings and where needed to ensure practice reflected the recommendations.</p> <p>The diversion and use of Prescribed only Medication remains a priority as part of the wider harm reduction work within Wales. Any individual seeking treatment for these issues will be assessed and given support to reduce the harms caused by these substances.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should confirm and explain its position on whether SSRI and SNRI antidepressants should be formally recognised as potentially leading to problems of dependence and withdrawal.</p>	<p>The Welsh Government’s position was set out in full in the Cabinet Secretary’s response to the Chair of the Petition’s Committee of May 2019.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should restate and emphasise antidepressants should not be routinely prescribed for mild depression in guidance to healthcare professionals, and should provide assurances that sufficient alternative treatment options, such as psychological therapies, are available across Wales.</p>	<p>All clinicians in Wales who treat depression are expected to do so in accordance with evidence based guidelines.</p> <p>In June 2022, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published guidance entitled <u>Depression in adults: treatment and management</u>, which sets out the range of treatment options available for people with depression including psychological and psychosocial interventions.</p> <p>We continue to invest in prevention and early intervention support, funding a</p>

	<p>number of services. These include providing free online cognitive behavioural therapy (Silvercloud) designed to help people with mild to moderate anxiety, depression or stress which is available to everyone residing in Wales, providing access to Reading Well a prescription reading service, and the CALL Mental Health Helpline for Wales.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should ensure that additional guidance is produced and promoted in relation to safe tapering of prescription medications, both for patients and health professionals.</p>	<p>The NICE guidance published in June 2022 includes specific advice for healthcare professionals on stopping antidepressant medication. In addition, all healthcare professionals working in NHS Wales have access to resources to support deprescribing including access to the Maudsley’s deprescribing guidelines entitled Safe Deprescribing of Antidepressants.</p> <p>A range of resources are available for people taking medicines for mental health, through the website Choice and Medication for NHS Wales. These include patient information leaflets and handy fact sheets covering a range of topics including stopping or coming off antidepressants.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should provide an update on the actions carried out in response to Recommendation 8 of the Health and Social Care Committee’s inquiry into Alcohol and Substance Misuse published in August 2015.</p>	<p>The Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019-22 identified tackling dependence on prescription only medicines (POM) and over the counter medicines (OTC) as a key priority . Our policy in Wales is to take an evidence based approach to the prescribing and administration of all medicines. In order to provide assurance that organisations adhere to this evidence based approach we routinely measure performance in key areas through national prescribing indicators, including a number relating to opioids use. The Welsh Government also recognises it is important we</p>

	<p>distinguish between substance misuse, as the harmful use of substances such as drugs and alcohol; and dependence arising from the therapeutic use of medicines whether they are prescribed or purchased.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should determine whether SSRI and SNRI antidepressants should be added to the list of drugs targeted for reduction, and should introduce a national prescribing indicator to support closer monitoring of prescribing volumes and patterns across Wales. This indicator should be used to identify areas where further investigation or intervention may be required.</p>	<p>The Welsh Government determined it would not be appropriate to introduce a prescribing indicator for SSRI and SNRI antidepressants. The rationale for this was set out in the Welsh Government's response of May 2019.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should investigate, as a priority, the potential for a national rollout of a service based upon the Prescribed Medication Support Service operating within Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, in order to ensure that specific advice and support is available for people who require assistance with prescription medication.</p>	<p>We continue to believe Primary care should be the first point of access, with the patient's GP ensuring appropriate prescribing, consistent monitoring and support for safe tapering, and titration of the medication where necessary. In addition, drug treatment services should provide support where necessary. As part of their needs assessments, Area Planning Boards should ensure this topic is covered and that services are engaging with GP practices to address this issue.</p> <p>Clinical pharmacists working in general practice as part of a multi-disciplinary team have a vital role to play in providing specialist expertise in medicines use while helping to address both the public health and social care needs of a patient at the practice</p>
<p>Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government should create opportunities for a coordinated strategy and greater information-sharing between health boards in relation to prescribed drug</p>	<p>The All Wales Medicines Strategy Group published updated educational resources for healthcare professionals to support the appropriate prescribing of</p>

dependence, with a view to improved sharing of best practice and to ensure equity of services and support to patients.

anxiolytic and hypnotic medicines in June 2021.

AWTTC published an updated educational pack to support [appropriate prescribing of hypnotics and anxiolytics](#) in July 2021 and work is currently underway to produce resources to support the appropriate prescribing of gabapentinoids.

The All Wales Therapeutics and Toxicology Centre (AWTTC) also facilitate regular online learning at lunch events and an annual best practice day, which enable the sharing of best practice between health boards and clinicians.

Recommendation 9. NHS Wales should make better use of the expertise of pharmacists to support evidence-based prescribing, patient monitoring including regular patient reviews, and increased provision of help with tapering and withdrawing from medication.

The Welsh Government's investment in primary care has resulted in a significant increase in the number of pharmacists working directly with GP practices to improve the quality of prescribing in a range of areas. As well as taking responsibility for providing care directly, these pharmacists are supporting GPs and other prescribers to improve the quality of prescribing through activities such as therapeutic monitoring and medication review. The number of pharmacists directly employed by GP practices in Wales was 208 in March 2025 an increase of 82.5% on March 2020.

The Welsh Government is aware the roles undertaken by pharmacists, and increasingly pharmacy technicians, working in general practice can vary. In response, the Welsh Government recently commissioned the Royal Pharmaceutical Society to undertake an independent review into the role of pharmacy professionals working within

	<p>general practice, which will be completed by spring 2026.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government should conduct and publish an assessment of the sufficiency of the advice available to people experiencing prescription drug dependence and withdrawal through the DAN24/7 helpline, including the adequacy of training for operators. The Welsh Government should ensure that the availability of advice related to prescribed drug dependence is promoted appropriately.</p>	<p>We continue to work with DAN 24/7 to ensure information is relevant and up to date. The DAN 24/7 website has also been upgraded to be digitally optimised for ease of accessibility and use via a mobile device.</p> <p>DAN 24/7 ensures that POMs are covered in the training and awareness operatives have, and this will continue to be evaluated to ensure further training is provided if necessary.</p> <p>DAN 24/7 provides a single point of contact for anyone in Wales wanting further information or help relating to drugs or alcohol, and the content of the website reflects current trends including prescription only medicines. The website provides details on specific drugs such as pregabalin and diazepam, alongside the provision of leaflets on prescription drugs.</p>