

Addiction to Medicines Consensus Statement

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For better
mental health

MIND in Camden Tranquilliser Service



THE BRITISH PAIN SOCIETY

1. Medicines have an important role in healthcare. However, dependence on prescribed and over-the-counter medicines can occur and can be devastating to those affected and their families. Care is needed in the initiation of any drugs that can lead to dependence and in managing the risk and development of withdrawal symptoms.
2. Medicines can be obtained via prescription, over-the-counter and from illicit and online markets. Some medicines, such as painkillers, and tranquillisers like benzodiazepines, carry a known risk of dependence. Health and social care professionals across the statutory and voluntary sector need to work together to prevent addiction to medicines from occurring and to support all those suffering dependence and its impact.
3. In line with the NHS Constitution, all patients should be treated with dignity and respect and provided with information to enable them to make informed decisions about their treatment. This should include information both about the risk of dependence, and about how this can be reduced by taking medicines as prescribed and in ways that are consistent with the information supplied with the medicines
4. Prescribing should be informed by the latest good quality guidance such as that provided by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), and where appropriate patients should be offered appropriate non-pharmacological options as alternatives or adjuncts to pharmacological treatments.
5. Practitioners and patients should reach agreement on the duration and review of any proposed course of medication or treatment. Longer term prescribing can increase the risk of dependence, and with some medicines, such as tranquillisers like benzodiazepines, should only be considered under exceptional circumstances and with regular review by practitioners with suitable expertise and understanding of the risks.
6. Care should be taken when reducing and stopping any medication because this can cause serious withdrawal symptoms in some patients and requires suitable expert support.
7. Patients should be supported to make informed decisions about their treatment and this should include information on the risk of dependence and withdrawal and how this can be reduced.
8. Everyone needs to be aware of the risk of dependence and be proactive to prevent it and address it when it occurs.
9. Addiction to medicines is a serious issue that is best addressed through collaborative action.
10. Evidence to support prescribing is available through the web-based NHS Evidence service managed by NICE (www.evidence.nhs.uk) and the British National Formulary, which is made available to all NHS prescribers.
11. Non-pharmacological options that can be used as alternatives or adjuncts to pharmacological treatment could include physical rehabilitation advice for pain conditions; and lifestyle advice, psychological and social therapies and support interventions for anxiety, depression and pain conditions.
12. Regardless of someone's route into dependence, there should be a clear pathway to support his or her individual recovery needs.
13. Very many of those individuals affected by dependence on prescription or over-the-counter medicines require expert treatment and support to reduce their medication. Withdrawal symptoms for some medicines can be prolonged and some individuals require a gradual reduction to achieve success. The recovery pathway for an individual needs to take account of the medicine(s) to which a patient is addicted, any ongoing physical or psychological health needs, the period of addiction and the wider support needs of the patient.
14. Local areas should ensure that there are services to respond to the range of local need.
15. Services dedicated to treating addiction to medicines, working alongside other community well-being services and primary care, can provide advice, support and individual reduction regimens that improve patient outcomes.
16. Through this consensus statement we will strive to deliver improvements to prevent addiction to medicines and to support those who have developed problems to recover.
17. We the undersigned, representing the Department of Health, professional groups, Royal Colleges, specialist services and voluntary organisations support this joint consensus statement on the action needed to tackle addiction to medicines.