

## **PE1651/M**

All-Party Parliamentary Group submission of 3 August 2017

The APPG for Prescribed Drug Dependence was launched in July 2015 to tackle the growing problem of prescribed drug dependence. Our mission is to recognise, address and reduce the harm caused by prescribed drug dependence. Our officers include myself, Lord Patel of Bradford, the Earl of Sandwich and Oliver Letwin MP. You can find out more about the APPG at <http://prescribeddrug.org>.

We wholeheartedly support the petition presented by Marion Brown of Recovery & Renewal. Recent research presented to the APPG by researchers at the University of Roehampton suggests that there may be over 770,000 patients taking antidepressants unnecessarily in England alone, and over 250,000 patients taking benzodiazepines beyond six months (NICE guidelines indicate use for 2-4 weeks maximum). The unnecessary cost of this prescribing is estimated at over £59m per year in England alone.

We believe that current service provision is entirely inadequate given the scale and complexity of this issue. Existing drug and alcohol treatment centres do not have the necessary skills or expertise to cope with this cohort of patients, most of whom do not consider themselves to be 'addicts'. GPs and psychiatrists are often unaware of the severity and duration of withdrawal symptoms, and many patients report that they are given inappropriate new diagnoses instead of doctors realising that their symptoms are due to drug withdrawal effects.

We therefore support the recent demand by the BMA for a dedicated national 24 hour helpline, with accompanying website, to help patients seeking to withdraw from benzodiazepines, antidepressants and opioids. This helpline and website would fill an essential gap in current service provision, and become a critical resource for patients, families and their doctors.

We have published a declaration of support for the helpline which has been signed by - among others - the BMA, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Royal College of GPs, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal Society for Public Health, the Medical Schools Council and the British Psychological Society. See <http://cepuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Declaration-of-support.pdf>.

We are currently lobbying the Department of Health and Public Health England regarding the provision of such a helpline, and are due to meet with representatives at our next meeting in September. Our previous meeting note with PHE can be seen here: <http://prescribeddrug.org/mps-and-peers-present-case-for-national-prescribed-drug-helpline-to-public-health-england/>

We urge the Committee to petition the Scottish Parliament to join the BMA and the APPG in our demand for a national helpline and to consider how this might be implemented for Scotland.