

PE1651/DD

Submission of 7 January 2018

I am suffering from the effects of withdrawing from anti depressants, having taken them for over 20 years.

I was originally prescribed these drugs to treat headaches, the drug was Venlafaxine. Over the years the dosage was increased to 225mg per day. During this period I was also prescribed another antidepressant, Amitriptyline which I was told also acts as a pain relief for the headaches I was experiencing.

At no point was I advised throughout these 20 years of the impact of withdrawing or a review of my medication other than to increase the dosage if my symptoms seemed worse. In hindsight and research I now believe my symptoms were that of withdrawal rather than the original complaint getting worse.

About 3 1/2 years ago I started having anxiety issues about my deceased father, my GP arranged for an appointment with a mental health facility to see if they could offer an alternative treatment as I expressed I wanted to decrease the Venlafaxine because I was tired and unable to function some days. After speaking to a clinician at the center, who liaised with a senior consultant, the outcome of this visit was to increase my 225g daily dosage !! My GP suggested a different anti depressant (he thought I had been taking them for too long, which is an understatement) and gave me a timetable to taper off Venlafaxine before starting the new drug. However, the timescales were too drastic and the amount of reduction made me feel very unwell. I was stuttering and lost all ability to function. He also prescribed Valium to cope 'as and when' I needed them. Again with hindsight this practice of poly drugging makes the impact of withdrawal much worse.

I was not advised of any dangers about coming off the drug so quickly and was left with devastating results to my health. I couldn't work and have never been able to resume because of the impact withdrawal has had on my life and family. My husband had to a stay off work to look after me for 5 months because I was very poorly with the withdrawal symptoms but he had to go back to earn money for our mortgage & bills. Eventually we lost our lovely home because of the impact withdrawal has had.

I still suffer after 31 months of stopping the drugs of horrific and debilitating symptoms. I have no life. I battle to survive each day against thoughts of wanting to end this torment but I won't because I know this is withdrawal from a toxic drug and I never suffered from any of these symptoms before taking it. I went to my gp to find relief from the headaches I was experiencing, not for depression.

During my nursing career I was never given any guidance when dispensing anti depressants in terms of its side effects, long term effects or subsequent withdrawal.

It's incredible that a prescribed drug, taken by 1000's of people can cause such devastation, yet the health service is oblivious to this widespread suffering and continues to be in denial. These drugs should never have been prescribed in the first place and should be banned in the future before more lives are taken.