

## **PE1651/YY**

Allison Hawtin submission of 7 January 2018

I want to submit evidence for the petition regarding withdrawal from antidepressants. I suffered from puerperal psychosis in 2010 following the birth of my son. After recovering from the psychosis fairly quickly I later went on to develop post natal depression and became extremely low. My GP prescribed the antidepressant Citalopram which, after several weeks and also increasing the dose had made no difference. I was also being treated by the Early Intervention Team and their psychiatrist then prescribed Venlafaxine to replace the Citalopram.

I cannot remember if I was given any warning at the time on how difficult it would be to eventually come off this antidepressant, however I doubt I would have cared then as I just wanted to be better and enjoy looking after my baby.

It took years for me to be back to my normal self again. I have no idea if I finally felt better in the end due to the medication or I'd just had time to adjust to my new life as a mum. But, when I did decide I didn't want to take Venlafaxine any more a whole new nightmare began.

Unfortunately the way Venlafaxine is manufactured makes coming off it even more difficult.

When I consulted with my psychiatrist to start weaning off I had to reduce my dose by 50%. He gave me no warning on what I would experience. I'd been taking 150mg for years but when I lowered to 75mg (the next available tablet dose) I had all manner of symptoms including: dizziness, nausea, vertigo, headaches, dry mouth, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, rapid weight loss and chest pain. As well as battling with my emotions coming back (the Venlafaxine had turned me in to an emotionless zombie) I was left housebound and unable to drive for weeks.

After a number of months my symptoms stabilised and I then later went for another drop. On the same day as making the next reduction the withdrawal symptoms returned.

Fortunately I have a good network of friends and a supporting husband that were able to help ferry my son back and forth to school as once again I was housebound. I had to resort to using a pill cutter in the end to try to make the reductions more manageable. At each reduction I was ill for weeks.

I took my final portion of Venlafaxine tablet in March 2017, it took over a year to finish weaning off and my psychiatrist wouldn't entertain the idea of protracted withdrawal. My psychiatrist kept saying my symptoms were somatic or medically unexplained.

There really needs to be a better understanding on how to successfully come off this kind of medication and how long and how debilitating the withdrawal can be.

I stopped working to start a family but had I been in paid work during this long period of illness I doubt my employer would have been sympathetic.