

PE1651/DDDDDDDD

Anonymous submission of 9 May 2018

I am a Physician Assistant from Virginia, USA. I am writing as I hope to voice my support for this petition.

I used to be a full-time, practicing PA until I had to voluntarily surrender my professional license because a long-term benzodiazepine prescription made me so incredibly ill I could no longer safely work or function. When I became tolerant to benzodiazepines, the tolerance was misdiagnosed as "mental illness" and I was polydrugged on Remeron (Mirtazapine) (weight loss), Seroquel (Quetiapine) (sleep), Adderall (amphetamine/dextroamphetamine) (depression because SSRIs caused terrible reactions), Ambien (Zolpidem) (sleep), in addition to the Klonopin (Clonazepam) and Xanax (Alprazolam) I was already being prescribed long term. I had no history of mental illness prior to taking the benzodiazepine, as the first one was initiated for "stress at work".

As a result of the above, I have been out of work since October 2010 and I suffer, alone and isolated, from protracted withdrawal syndrome because an ignorant physician cold-turkeyed me instead of recommending the gold standard of care--a slow, controlled taper. I was also mislabeled and stigmatized as an "addict" in spite of that I had been taking benzodiazepines compliantly at the direction of a psychiatrist. This is due to the medical profession's lack of education as to the difference between prescribed physical dependence and addiction as well as proper deprescribing protocols. Proper education should teach them these things and also stress that they are to allow the patient to be in charge of the rate/speed a slow taper when discontinuation has been chosen.

I could be a productive tax-paying member of society and, instead, I am collecting social security disability because of my total lack of ability to maintain gainful employment or to have any kind of life whatsoever outside of my home.

When I told the prescribing psychiatrist, the one who kept me on these drugs for years when they are intended only for short-term use, she fired me as a patient in the middle of my cold-turkey withdrawal; this in spite of me being suicidal, psychotic and so ill it was incompatible with human life. Most likely she feared a lawsuit—my health and dire medical condition be damned.

My family has had to witness his once healthy, productive, intelligent, active child lose everything and be bed-ridden for the last 7 years because of these drugs. I became violent, rageful, psychotic, paranoid, and hysterical with anxiety and panic after their abrupt cessation. I wanted to die. Actually, I wanted nothing more than to live, I just didn't think I could endure the seemingly never-ending torture that was required to get off of the drugs. And I wanted off; tolerance withdrawal on the drugs was a miserable existence of suffering as well that I refused to accept. On the drugs, I existed as a depressed, anxious, suicidal zombie with major personality changes for all 5 years I was on them, only I didn't know why at the time. I wasted tons of money and time seeing specialist after specialist trying to figure out what was wrong with me, and **not one of them** ever identified that tolerance, interdose withdrawal, and benzodiazepine/polydrug psychiatric medication toxicity were causing all of my

illness. Instead, I was misdiagnosed as being "mentally ill" (of which I had no history of) and was poly drugged and damaged further with more brain-disabling psychiatric drugs until I was a non-functional (barely) walking, talking chemical soup.

Now, nearing six years off the benzodiazepines and eight off of all the others (and having taken no medications at all in that time), I am still mostly bed bound with crippling neuropathy resulting from the withdrawal syndrome after abrupt cessation. I also suffer from depersonalization, derealization, cognitive impairments, apathy, crushing fatigue, headaches worse than any I've ever had in my life, muscle spasticity, nausea, dizziness, hair loss, mental confusion, agitation, irritability, anhedonia, rage—to name a few.

I had 2 suicide attempts as a result of these drugs; thankfully neither were successful. Although, I am still not sure that I will survive, as it has been almost 8 years and, while there have been slow improvements, there is yet to be a sign that there will be an end to this torment that persists inside of my tortured body and mind. Although grossly lacking, studies are disparate and indicate that anywhere between 20-90% of people taking benzodiazepines long-term will experience withdrawal and adverse effects. Studies also indicate that anxiety **worsens** in people taking benzodiazepines long-term, so why have they been allowed for decades to be continually prescribed for anxiety past the recommended 2-4 week guidelines? Studies show that Alprazolam fails for panic disorder and agoraphobia, and that benzodiazepines as a whole are contraindicated for PTSD, and yet they're still prescribed for these conditions.

All of the information you need about these drugs and their harms exists; all anyone has to do is read, learn and pay attention, and then eventually act to prevent this medical disaster from persisting.

There is absolutely zero logic in regulating opiates and not regulating benzodiazepines. The withdrawal syndromes from benzodiazepines are far more dangerous and can be deadly. However, and this is important, **people who are already dependent on these drugs need to be afforded the right to remain on them or to taper at a rate and speed that is comfortable for them.** If you pass legislation that does not allow for this, you are going to cause deaths and severe, long-term (many years, much like my story) protracted withdrawal syndromes akin to living torture because those already dependent will be forced to rapidly taper and cold-turkey.

They do not teach about physical dependence to psychiatric drugs or about deprescribing in PA and medical school in the U.S. where I attended. These drugs are maiming people and medical providers have exactly zero clues (except for a rare few) about the tolerance/interdose withdrawal and physical dependence they can potentially cause, nor about short-term prescribing guidelines or the proper way to discontinue them. Doctors are great at getting you physically dependent on them, but that is where any "help" from them stops. I was "wet behind the ears" and fresh out of school when they were prescribed to me and knew very little of them, nor was I

given any kind of informed consent about the drugs and their risks/dangers when they were prescribed for "work stress". The only problem the drugs solved was that now I no longer have mild "work stress" because I am too crippled and debilitated for employment; so, in that sense—the drugs "work".

Please do the humane and ethical thing in response to this petition. I urge the Scottish Government to take action to appropriately recognize and effectively support individuals affected and harmed by prescribed drug dependence and withdrawal. Look to existing withdrawal charities in the UK for guidance and consult with experts, like those at cepuk.org

I, personally, will never stop spreading awareness about these drugs and the horror that they are capable of, and I know many thousands of others that have plans to continue with advocacy and awareness, as well, until there is change, including guidelines in place and regulations around these drugs. **The problem is not going to go away until something is done about it.** Almost 60 years have passed since the introduction of the benzodiazepines and we are all still waiting for consumers to be protected against their misprescription and the totally avoidable devastating outcomes resulting from that misprescription. Hopefully, this petition results in a "blazing of the trail" and the rest of the world is prompted to follow suit.