

Vaughan Gething AC/AM
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd a Gwasanaethau
Cymdeithasol
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our ref VG/05382/17

David John Rowlands AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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4 January 2018

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 12 December on behalf of the Petitions Committee concerning Petition P-05-784: Prescription drug dependence and withdrawal - recognition and support. I shall respond to the specific points you have highlighted.

- **whether antidepressants should be added to the list of drugs targeted for reduction by the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group;**

As you are aware there are clear guidelines in place from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) for the prescribing of antidepressant drugs and the treatment of depression. Comprehensive guidance on the prescribing and monitoring of hypnotics and anxiolytics, including benzodiazepines were published by the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group in 2011 and updated in 2016. This includes guidance on prescribing and reduction/tapering over time.

Clinicians are required to follow these guidelines and use their clinical judgement in determining what course of treatment to prescribe to their patients, based on their patients' individual needs and medical history. The options for treatment include psychosocial interventions in addition to or as an alternative to prescribed medication.

Depression can be linked to the presence of chronic physical illness as well as deprivation; in some areas of Wales there is a high burden of such problems. Also, debt can lead to increased levels of stress and anxiety, to physical and mental health problems such as depression, low self esteem and relationship breakdown and even to loss of employment, which can lead to increased levels of mental ill health. Prescribing antidepressants is one aspect of helping patients manage their condition and reducing access to these medicines by requiring fewer prescriptions to be issued could be too simplistic an approach.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Nevertheless, my officials will investigate the scope and need for any further guidance over and above that already published by NICE and the degree to which a national prescribing indicator might support clinical decision-making.

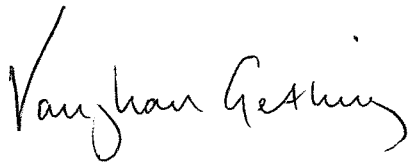
- **whether patients across Wales should have access to a Prescribed Medication Support Service.**

Tackling dependence on prescription only medicines and over the counter medicines is a priority for this government. Our Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18 contains a number of specific actions in this regard. This includes targeted prevention and awareness raising campaigns and the development of a specific Substance Misuse Treatment Framework (SMTF) focusing specifically on prescription only medicines and over the counter medicines. This guidance, expected to be published in March 2018 will assist our seven Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards (APBs) to commission and deliver treatment services to support those who are dependent on a range of drugs, based on the identified need in their areas.

You may also wish to be aware that help and support is available through DAN247, a free and bilingual telephone drugs helpline providing a single point of contact for anyone in Wales wanting further information or help relating to drugs (including prescription drugs) or alcohol and provides information on services available in their local areas. Individuals can access it on 0808 808 2234 or by visiting www.dan247.org.

Thank you again for writing to me on this matter. I hope my response is helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Vaughan Gething AC/AM

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