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Cymru Wales

David Rowlands AM,
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
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06 February 2018

Petition P-05-784 Prescription drug dependence and withdrawal - recognition and support

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 31 January regarding the petition on prescription drug dependence, and recognition and support for those individuals affected.

Prescribing of psychoactive drugs is a major clinical activity and a key therapeutic tool for influencing the health of patients. However, when certain psychoactive drugs are inappropriately prescribed there is potential for patients to become dependent or suffer withdrawal symptoms, leading to a range of health and social harms.

In the absence of robust data, we do not know the true scale and extent of this problem across the UK. However, the evidence and insight presented to us by many charity and support groups shows that it is substantial.

In response to this problem, the BMA board of science undertook a [collaborative project](#) with a range of organisations including the medical royal colleges, professional groups, and patient organisations which culminated in a discussion event to identify policy asks that could be supported by all stakeholders.

This event led to four key policy calls:

Cyfarwyddwr Cenedlaethol (Cymru)/National director (Wales):

Rachel Podolak

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- the UK government, working with the devolved nations, should introduce a national, 24 hour helpline for prescribed drug dependence;
- each of the UK governments, relevant health departments and local authorities should establish, adequately resourced specialist support services for prescribed drug dependence;
- clear guidance on tapering and withdrawal management should be developed collaboratively with input from professional groups and patients;
- and better education and training for healthcare professionals.

To take this forward, the BMA wrote to the Department of Health England and each of the devolved governments specifically calling for the establishment of a national helpline to support those individuals affected.

We continue to raise this issue and our recommendations in discussions with the UK's governments and politicians.

Yours sincerely



Rachel Podolak
Director, BMA Cymru Wales