

CONTROLLED DRUGS NEWSLETTER



NHS ENGLAND SOUTH WEST

December 2017

THE KNOWN HARMS OF GABAPENTIN AND PREGABALIN ARE BRINGING CHANGE

The government has launched a consultation to seek views on whether to schedule pregabalin and gabapentin as Controlled Drugs in the UK.

We encourage you to participate in this consultation – you can do so [online](#).

Gabapentin and pregabalin have been in use in the UK for nearly twenty years. In that time there has been huge growth in the use of these clinically effective drugs. Whilst originally licensed for control of epilepsy, they now have a number of indications; including the management of neuropathic pain and for anxiety.

Unfortunately these drugs are also now diverted, misused, and have a street value because they produce feelings of euphoria, relaxation and calmness. There is a growing illicit market, and pregabalin and gabapentin are also being bought online from unregulated websites. They are known to enhance the euphoric effects of other drugs, including opiates. There is an increased risk of harm when they are used in combination with opiates and/or alcohol and there has been an increase in the number of deaths in which either pregabalin or gabapentin have been recorded on the death certificate (111 deaths in 2016).

Manufacturers have now openly acknowledged the risk of harm associated with misuse of pregabalin; for example Pfizer (manufacturer of the original brand Lyrica®) state *'Caution should be exercised in patients with a history of substance abuse and the patient should be monitored for symptoms of pregabalin misuse, abuse or dependence'*.

Links:

Public Health England (2014)
[Advice for prescribers on the risk of the misuse of pregabalin and gabapentin](#)

The Telegraph (2015)
[New warning over abuse of prescription drugs](#)

BBC Radio 4 (2015)
[Inside Health: pregabalin and gabapentin misuse](#)

University of Oxford (2017)
[Prescribing of pregabalin by all CCGs](#)

British Medical Journal (2017)
[Misuse of gabapentin and pregabalin is potentially being underestimated](#)

FRANK (2017)
[Gabapentin](#) and [Pregabalin](#)

Plymouth Herald (2017)
[Family pays tribute to 'gentle giant' Glyn after fatal overdose](#)

There is significant variation in the prescribing of these drugs nationally; in the South West use is highest in Cornwall & Devon. In recent years a number of Clinical Commissioning Groups in the South West have worked on initiatives with their member practices to review patients prescribed gabapentin and pregabalin to ensure their use is safe, effective and financially sustainable. The NHS cost of pregabalin has fallen sharply this year, but its use continues to be of significant concern.

Richard Byng, professor in primary care research at Plymouth University and a GP in the city, has [said](#) 'Thousands of people are addicted to a range of drugs originally licensed to treat epilepsy and nerve pain'. He is calling for pharmacists, doctors and patients' groups to work together to reduce prescribing.

KEY POINTS

- **If faced with a request for these medicines, note that some patients specifically request them with the intention of selling the medication, using the medication to enhance the effects of opioids, or to manage agitation resulting from illicit drug use**
- **Prioritise the review of patients prescribed gabapentin or pregabalin in combination with opioids to reduce the risk of harm - your local CCG medicines optimisation team can help you do this**
- **Concomitant use of pregabalin with methadone is especially risky as both drugs prolong QT interval**
- **The national consultation is now open – please provide your thoughts by responding [here](#).**

Links:

Pfizer Ltd. (2017)
[Summary of product characteristics - Lyrica](#)

University of Bristol (2017)
[Combining heroin and commonly prescribed non-opioid pain killers leads to a significant rise in overdose deaths](#)

The Guardian (2017)
[Pregabalin, known as 'new valium', to be made class C drug after deaths](#)

Devon Live (2017)
[In the grip of a drugs crisis](#)

BBC Three (2017)
[Belfast's pregabalin addiction](#)

NHS Dorset CCG (2017)
[Prescribing advice for pregabalin](#)

Office for National Statistics (2017)
[Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2016 registrations](#)

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