



Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-784
Ein cyf/Our ref RE/00954/17

David John Rowlands AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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18 October 2017

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter about the petition that has been received from Stevie Lewis on prescription drug dependence. I am responding as substance misuse falls within my portfolio.

I recognise the misuse of prescription only and over the counter medicines causes serious health problems for some. Misuse can include situations where there may have been poor prescribing practices that may have led to dependency or other problems, as well as use for which the medication was not originally intended.

The Welsh Government has a 10-year strategy in place to tackle the associated harms of substance misuse and this sets out our approach to tackling the full range of substances that are misused in Wales. This includes prescription only medicines and over the counter medicines, such as preparations containing codeine.

We invest almost £50m in the substance misuse agenda annually, with £22.6m provided to the seven Area Planning Boards (APBs) which are responsible for commissioning all local substance misuse services in order to support those who are dependent on a range of drugs, including prescription only medicines and over the counter medicines.

Tackling dependence on prescription only medicines and over the counter medicines is a priority for me, which is why there are a number of specific actions in our Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18 relating to this. 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 APBs

and treatment services in responding to the needs of those with a dependence on these medicines.

The Welsh Government's independent expert Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse (APoSM) published a report in 2015 entitled '*Reducing the harms associated with prescription-only analgesics: Tramadol*' which made a number of recommendations to address the issue of deaths associated with tramadol and other POM medicines. As a follow up to this report, the Panel is also currently examining the issues associated with analgesics (including opioid analgesics) other than tramadol, in order to make recommendations to improve safe, effective and appropriate use.

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. In addition, 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. In addition, a specific Welsh Health Circular providing advice for prescribers on the risk of the misuse of pregabalin and gabapentin was disseminated throughout Wales in July 2016.

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.

I hope this information provides you with background to the work that is currently being undertaken in Wales relating to prescription only medicines and over the counter medicines. The Welsh Government recognises this is an important issue on the substance misuse agenda and my officials will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that those individuals with a dependence on prescription only medicines and over the counter medicines receive the necessary support and appropriate treatment.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Evans". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rebecca Evans AC/AM

Gweinidog Iechyd y Cyhoedd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Social Services and Public Health