

LAWSON PRACTICE

At the Lawson Practice we take patient safety very seriously and this letter highlights the risk around taking benzodiazepine and related medications. These include Temezepam, Diazepam, Nitrazepam, Lorazepam, Clonazepam, Zopiclone and Zolpidem.

We wish to alert you to the dangers of taking these medications long term as they are only meant for short term use. These risks have been highlighted by the Drug Safety Update 2011 and a large study published in the BMJ in 2014.

There is strong evidence that taking these medications reduces brain function including reduced concentration, memory problems, daytime sleepiness (especially in the elderly population increasing their risk of falls and hip fractures) and worsening anxiety. Using these medications long term increases the risk of developing dementia.

These medications, as you may be aware, are highly addictive and therefore stopping them can cause withdrawal symptoms and worsening of sleep.

This can be helped by reducing the dose very slowly and taking it less frequently over time.

Our new practice policy has changed and we will no longer be commencing new prescription of these medications.

In addition, these medications will no longer be put on repeat prescription meaning that you will have to specifically request these medications each month and will be limited to a maximal 28 day supply.

We would like to discuss these medications with our patients with a view to gradually reducing and coming off these medications. The practice does appreciate the anxiety that this policy may cause for some of our patients but we will endeavour to work with you so you will experience no or minimal discomfort during the process.

Please book in a phone appointment with your usual GP or our in house practice pharmacist, David.

Dr Rauf and Partners

LAWSON PRACTICE

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

1. My medicine was started by the consultant, why are you changing it

The consultant has transferred your care to the GP and the GP has to make sure that the medicine is being used safely. It is now the GPs responsibility

2. I have been taking this medicine for several years and I am happy with it, why do you need to change it

The medicine was not designed to be used for long periods of time. The prolonged use of the medicine has harmful effects which may include addiction and dependence and possibly loss of memory.

3. I am not able to sleep or function if you stop this medicine. It was stopped before and I felt very bad so the doctor put me back on it

The medicine should not be stopped abruptly. If it does, you may feel bad as you said. The GP is going to work with you to reduce the dose gradually at a pace at which you are comfortable with over several months.

4. I have been using the medicine for several years and it has caused me no harm. Why do I have to stop using it now

The use of benzodiazepine is associated with harmful effects which include addiction and dependence. It can cause partial or total loss of memory. It may cause confusion and loss of full control of bodily movement especially as you get older. These medicines affect the natural way in which you sleep and because of that your state of mind can be disturbed making you restless, delusional and incoherent. The disturbed mental ability may result in confused thinking and reduced awareness of your environment.

If you are not experiencing any of these yet, then it will be good that you are taken off before you experience any of them.

5. What if I do not want to come off my benzodiazepine

The GPs will have a discussion with you to encourage and help you in any way possible to come off it. The practice cannot continue to do the wrong thing for patients, especially now that the matter has been highlighted and the practices have been made aware of it directly. The practice therefore has agreed that this is our policy and will apply to all patients for the reasons we have outlined