



Western Vale Family Practice

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Practice Prescribing Policy for Benzodiazepines and Z-drugs

GPs, nurses, and pharmacists in this practice will prescribe hypnotics and anxiolytics (benzodiazepines and z-drugs) in line with national and locally developed guidelines ¹:

- First-line treatment should be non-pharmacological measures.
- Where benzodiazepine or z-drug treatment is indicated, first-line options should be:
 - Anxiolytic: diazepam
 - Hypnotic: temazepam or zopiclone
- For patients who have not received these drugs regularly, clinicians will only prescribe hypnotics and anxiolytics for a maximum of 14 days and at the lowest effective dose. They will only be prescribed if the GP, nurse, or pharmacist feels that the condition is severe, disabling and subjecting the patient to extreme distress and/or for those where other interventions have not been successful. The following guidance published by NICE ² will apply:
 - The indication for starting a hypnotic or anxiolytic will be documented.
 - Other possible causes of sleep disturbance will be recorded (e.g. pain, dyspnoea, depression) and treated appropriately.
 - All patients will receive advice on non-drug therapies for anxiety and insomnia.
 - Patients will be advised on the potential problems of dependence and addiction.
 - A second prescription will not be issued without a follow-up visit to a clinician. Benzodiazepines or z-drugs should not be taken for more than 2–4 weeks (including tapering off).
- Patients who are already on a regular benzodiazepine or z-drug prescription will be assessed and, if appropriate, counselled for a withdrawal scheme with the aim to gradually reduce drug dosage to zero.
- Patients who are unable or unwilling to reduce drug dosage via a managed withdrawal scheme (or who use more than one drug of abuse potential, or who are dependent on alcohol) may be referred to the substance misuse service, as appropriate.

1. All Wales Medicines Strategy Group. Educational Pack: Material to Support Appropriate Prescribing of Hypnotics and Anxiolytics across Wales. December 2016.
<http://www.awmsg.org/docs/awmsg/medman/Educational%20Pack%20-%20Material%20to%20Support%20Appropriate%20Prescribing%20of%20Hypnotics%20and%20Anxiolytics%20across%20Wales.pdf>
2. NICE KTT6 Hypnotics March 2019 <https://www.nice.org.uk/advice/ktt6>

- Prescriptions for hypnotics and anxiolytics should not be routinely available on repeat. However, the practice accepts that there may be a small minority of people who need to be on a small maintenance dose of a benzodiazepine. Examples are people:
 - with severe mental health problems under care of a psychiatrist;
 - on benzodiazepines for treatment of epilepsy;
 - who are seriously or terminally ill.
- Lost medicines or prescriptions will not be replaced. It is the responsibility of the patient and/or their carer to ensure that controlled drugs are stored securely.
- Patients will be allocated a 'usual doctor' and will only deal with this person.
- If a patient takes higher doses than prescribed, and runs out of medication before the next prescription is due, they will not be prescribed extra tablets.
- The practice will undertake a regular review and audit of the prescribing practice of benzodiazepines and z-drugs to ensure compliance with national and local guidelines.
- Requests for small quantities of diazepam for a severe fear of flying will be prescribed on a private prescription, if considered appropriate for prescribing by one of the clinical team.
- Temporary residents should note that:
 - patients not currently on an anxiolytic or hypnotic will be treated according to NICE guidelines and the practice policy
 - regular users will not receive prescriptions without proof of dosage, frequency and date of last prescription; this can be obtained from the patient's surgery. If they remain with the practice for more than two weeks, they should enter the reducing scheme and the policy should be followed as for a registered patient.
- Any new patients currently on hypnotics or anxiolytics will be informed that they will be placed on a withdrawal regimen (unless they fall into the exclusion criteria above), when they register with the practice.

1. All Wales Medicines Strategy Group. Educational Pack: Material to Support Appropriate Prescribing of Hypnotics and Anxiolytics across Wales. December 2016.
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