

Pain and addiction to pain killers

Addiction is defined as not having control over doing, taking or using something to the point where it could be harmful to you.

Being addicted to something means not having it cause withdrawal symptoms. Because this can be unpleasant, it can be easier to carry on having or doing what you crave, and the cycle continues.

Addiction to prescription drugs has become a significant problem in the UK. The main group of prescription medications that people become addicted to are: opioids (pain relief), benzodiazepines (sedatives used for anxiety and to aid sleep), and stimulants (for ADHD and narcolepsy).

Persistent painful conditions such as backache, neck ache, abdominal or generalised pain can affect as many as 1 in 7 people. As we get older persistently painful conditions can become even more common.

For people taking opioids for chronic persistent pain only 1 in 5 are likely to show any benefit. That benefit is unlikely to amount to more than a 30% reduction in the pain intensity. However people taking long-term opiates on the whole are likely to have a lower quality of life, to spend more time in hospital, are less likely to be in work and on average have higher pain scores.

What are the signs that might indicate addiction to look for in yourself and others?

- Needing to take more of the drug to get an appropriate effect
- Asking for repeat prescriptions early.
- Difficulty in trying to cut down or stop drug use
- Feeling guilty about the drug use
- Problems with work, finances or legal issues
- Being secretive about the drug use
- Arguments or disagreements with significant others about the drug use
- Taking other medications to alleviate side effects of prescription drugs
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when stopping/reducing the drug or between doses (differ with each drug) but can include anxiety, depression, seizures, tremor and insomnia
- Continuing to take the drug despite actual or likely negative consequences. (Action on Addiction).

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The NHS and local authorities are required to provide support for people addicted to prescription or over-the-counter medicines.

GPs should be the first port of call for problems with addiction to these medications. They are well-placed to offer advice and support to patients and have been at the forefront of initiatives to prevent and reduce this problem.

In addition, specialist help should also be provided to anyone who needs it. Health professionals should be alert to the signs that a patient may be addicted to a prescription drug.

Cornish specialist services are available for problems with a full range of prescribed and over the counter medicines, including: Benzodiazepines (for anxiety); z-drugs (prescribed for insomnia); Opioid and some other pain medicines, both prescribed and bought over-the-counter; Stimulants, prescribed for ADHD or slimming; some over the counter cough and cold medicines, anti-histamines and stimulants.

The government (Public Health England) also suggest that anyone who is concerned they may be dependent on (or addicted to) medicines which have been prescribed to them can get advice from their GP, a community pharmacist, the 111 helpline or the online NHS Choices service.

In addition, the government's drugs information service, Talk to FRANK provides advice on how to access specialist drug treatment services, including services which help people who have a dependence on a medicine prescribed to them. For example with Benzodiazepine dependence/addiction The Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said it did not support long-term use of Benzodiazepines, other than in 'exceptional circumstances' where the benefits outweighed the risks for that patient - and that people should normally only take them for a few weeks. For patients taking them for longer periods, any withdrawal management needs to be

undertaken carefully and at a reduction rate that is tolerable for the patient.

Don't forget, if you have difficulty coming off prescription drugs, there's a wide range of addiction services that can help.

Firstly, if you can think of someone that you trust let them know about your problem and then speak with your GP.

Addiction is treatable, and with the right help it is possible to become prescription drug free and stay that way.

Looking at Cornwall

National prescribing databases enable us to look at the prescribing across different regions in the country. In Cornwall we prescribe more opiates, benzodiazepines and sleeping tablets than approximately 70% of other clinical commissioning group areas. On one particular ward in Treliske Hospital it was recognised that a number of patients were being frequently admitted with chronic abdominal pain requiring prolonged high doses of intravenous morphine and there was a concern that this represented a much greater dependence and addiction problem than it did a medical problem.

As a result a group of clinicians at Treliske Hospital from Gastroenterology, Pain Medicine, Liaison Psychiatry and General Practice have got together to develop a quality improvement strategy to look at the prescribing of opioids in Cornwall with the aim of reducing it to the national average by 2018. They have developed a range of measures which includes information for patients, GP's and prescribers, policies for the hospital and advice on opioid reduction. There were involved in developing a short piece on Inside Out South West which was screened on 27 February 2017 to publicise this issue.

Advice and Support

Talk to FRANK

Frank incorporates a phone line, e-mail, SMS and a website which offers information, advice, tips and acts as a signpost to local services, drop-in centres and groups.

Tel: **0800 77 66 00**

Web: www.talktofrank.com

NHS Choices

Web: www.nhs.uk

Addaction

Offer a free and confidential advice, information and support with drug and alcohol problems. You can self-refer by contacting Addaction Cornwall direct or you may be referred by your GP, another professional or a family member. There are centres in Truro, St Austell, Redruth and Penzance and a young persons service in Truro also.

Tel: **0333 2000 325**

Addaction YZUP (young persons service)

Tel: **01872 300816**

Boswyns in Hayle

A short stay registered care home providing assessment, stabilisation and detoxification for anyone aged 18 to 65 years of age. To be referred you need to either be: in treatment with a community specialist drug and alcohol service in Cornwall or referred from this service.

Bosence in Hayle,

Residential rehabilitation for people recovering from alcohol/drug dependence, within a safe, stable and tranquil setting with single bedrooms in a converted farmhouse. To be referred you need to

submit an application either directly or through your Care Co-ordinator.

Samaritans

To speak to someone anonymously about a prescription drug addiction, you can call the Samaritans free on **116 123**.