

Pregabalin and Gabapentin – abuse potential and safety concerns

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Public Health England issued advice to prescribers on the risk of the misuse of pregabalin and gabapentin, which is available @ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>

Misuse of gabapentin and pregabalin has been noted for some years in clients attending substance misuse treatment and recovery services, and within prisons. Deaths connected to pregabalin have been rising in recent years. Currently, pregabalin appears to be more sought after for misuse than gabapentin. There is a growing illegal market, and these drugs are also being bought through online pharmacies.

When prescribing pregabalin (or gabapentin), it is important to be aware that the side effects of euphoria, detachment and increased energy have led to it being increasingly used for recreational purposes, resulting in a growing number of reported cases of dependence, misuse and diversion. Gabapentin and pregabalin have the propensity to cause depression of the central nervous system, resulting in drowsiness, sedation, respiratory depression and at the extreme, death. The adverse effects of these medicines on the central nervous system, are additive when used with other centrally acting drugs, particularly opioid based medications.

Health care professionals are reminded to consider the potential risk of abuse and addiction when initiating patients on pregabalin or gabapentin. They should only be prescribed when the benefits clearly outweigh the risks and once less harmful alternative first line treatments have been considered.

Vigilance should be exercised when repeated requests are made for high doses and quantities of pregabalin or gabapentin and regular reviews of ongoing treatment undertaken to ensure these medicines remain an appropriate treatment option.

Where dependence is suspected, specialist intervention, restrictions or withdrawal of medication may need to be considered. **It is recommended that withdrawal of these medicines should only be considered in a slow and controlled manner**, throughout which the patient is closely monitored.

Prescribers should note that pregabalin and gabapentin are set, subject to a consultation, to be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 as Class C substances and scheduled under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 (as amended) as Schedule 3. If approved this mean prescriptions will need to comply with Controlled Drug prescription requirements and will only be valid for 28 days.

*For further information visit www.elmmb.nhs.uk or contact the
Medicines Management Teams on 01282 644801 (EL CCG)*