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Doctors sued for creating 'Valium addicts'

Patients take legal action after being damaged by over-prescription of drugs

NINA LAKHANI | THURSDAY 29 DECEMBER 2011

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Doctors are being sued for creating prescription drug addicts amid claims they have failed to follow safety guidelines published more than 20 years ago.

Suggested Topics

Healthcare

Lawyers and medical experts have reported an increase in clinical negligence cases by patients left physically and psychologically broken by "indefensible" long-term prescribing of addictive tranquillisers such as Valium, collectively known as benzodiazepines.

Patients taken off the drugs too quickly, leaving them disabled with pain for months if not years, are also seeking legal redress. Many say they were never told about the dangers of rapid detoxification, which can lead to seizures and even death in severe cases. Doctors have been accused of being "in denial" about the problem.

Experts have warned of a coming flood of legal action against

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doctors who failed to inform their patients about the addictive nature of some tranquillisers, currently given to millions of people worldwide. They are prescribed to deal with common social and psychological complaints, from exam stress to relationship problems and bereavement.

Professor Malcolm Lader, whose research in the 1980s suggested a link between long-term tranquilliser use and brain damage, said he now gives legal advice about negligent prescribing and dangerous detoxifications "at least every three months".

He told The Independent: "There is no sign that such prescribing is diminishing. The Royal College of GPs is in denial about this because they fear being sued. With around a million long-term users, the [legal] defence unions will at some point decide that these cases are indefensible and GPs will have to pay their own costs." A report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Drug Misuse estimated in 2009 that there were 1.5 million involuntary tranquilliser addicts in the UK. More than 6.6 million benzodiazepine prescriptions for anxiety were dispensed by England's pharmacies in 2010, a 15 per cent increase in 10 years. Prescriptions for Valium have increased by 20 per cent over the same period.

The first successful legal claim against individual doctors dates back to 2002, when Ray Nimmo, who was prescribed Valium for 14 years, won his case against GPs in Scunthorpe. His lawyer, Caroline Moore, has had five new referrals in the past month.

Some people develop a tolerance after regular use for two weeks, needing a higher dose to induce the same effects; others report using them for years with few adverse effects. For most, stopping is the problem: they can experience a range of painful psychological and physical symptoms, worse than their original complaint.

Dr Adrian Rogers, a GP who is also an expert in medico-legal cases, said: "I can't believe there aren't more claims. The fact that lots of doctors are prescribing long-term isn't an excuse - no responsible GP would do it."

There are only a handful of specialist tranquilliser withdrawal services across the UK. Most people rely on inexpert help from GPs or addiction services aimed at illegal-drug addicts. Recovery Road, a new helpline, receives around 250 calls a month, mainly from those who have detoxified too rapidly. "These poor people describe being in a kind of torture chamber," said Baylissa Frederick, of the organisation.

The Bridge Project in Bradford tracks down long-term benzodiazepine users. In five months this year, one of its specialist drugs workers helped 102 patients.

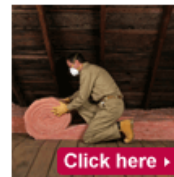
Dr Chris Ford, a GP and benzodiazepine expert, is drafting new guidance to help doctors avoid creating addicts and advise them on the best way safely to detoxify those who are already dependent. Controversially, it will endorse long-term use for a limited number of patients. "These are good drugs - they work, but it is a slippery slope if doctors do not have systems in place to make sure they are only used in the short term," she said.

"These people should not be treated like illicit drug users. Any detox has to be done very slowly. These drugs can cause serious long-term problems, so GPs should encourage people to come off

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them, but, for some, it is necessary to compromise. No one should be forced to withdraw," she added.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said: "The Government's drug strategy set out [in the White Paper Healthy Lives, Healthy People] an ambition to tackle dependence on all drugs, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines. It is clear that this is a problem that affects some people in most areas and is much unreported. Public health bodies will be responsible for the commissioning of services to support people recovering from dependence."

Case studies: Lives blighted by addiction

'It was like the doctors were my drug dealers'

Rachel, 62, from the Midlands. Rachel (not her real name) is trying to sue an NHS clinic that detoxed her from tranquillisers so rapidly she has been left bedridden

"Around nine years ago my GP prescribed me Valium. I didn't know it was addictive; my doctor kept giving me repeat prescriptions over the phone. I didn't have any problems until five years ago when I started to get numbness in my face and irregular heartbeats.

"I was offered a detox in an NHS rehab unit... I was in for five weeks, and they cut me down 1mg every other day, which they insisted was very slow. It was absolute hell.

"I didn't want to go back on the drug but I had no choice. Most days I can't stand up... my memory has gone. Listening to those detox people is the biggest mistake I ever made. The doctor won't accept the pain is caused by the withdrawal."

'Listening to those NHS detox people is the biggest mistake I ever made'

Janet Marshall, 53, from Wakefield, West Yorkshire, won £25,000 in an out-of-court settlement from her GP after "losing" 28 years to prescribed benzodiazepines

"I was 26, I'd just had my fourth baby, and I had a panic attack. I called the GP because I thought I was dying, and was prescribed oxazepam, even though I was breast-feeding. I became hooked, taking 15 10mg tablets a day at one point.

My fifth child was born an addict; he suffered withdrawal symptoms, but by this time I couldn't cope without them. Sometimes my pharmacist would give me some to tide me over the weekend if I'd run out. Five years ago, I changed GP, and she said I had a problem and started cutting me down, but far too quickly. It was like the doctors were my drug dealers. I couldn't talk properly or stop shaking. It lasted for months, but I felt so much more alert and got my senses back.

"I feel angry and bitter at the Government, the pharmaceutical companies, the GPs – they all knew about it. I was a healthy normal person before the benzos; I was a good mother but I was robbed of that. I feel so guilty about my kids."

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CoteAlberto65

my neighbor's mother makes \$81/hr on the computer. She has been out of a job for 7 months but last month her check was \$8709 just working on the computer for a few hours. Read more here...trunc.it/inw0y

0 minutes ago

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welshwitch

I spent several years suffering from asthma which various GPs were too useless to diagnose. Instead, and no doubt because I was female, they prescribed valium (and nobrium and librium), which, as I had the sense to check up on, I didn't take.

I should be delighted to see a series of successful cases brought against similar pushers and the defedents convicted then bankrupted by having to pay costs and compensation.

30 minutes ago

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



kitman3

why is it always the doctors fault?
don't the pill heads bear any responsibility?
what happened to personal responsibility in this country?
always blaming some one else that's why Obumbler can
get away with his demagoguery, lies and class warfare
laced with envy.
welcome to the entitlement nanny state.
the only ones making money are the lawyers.
Progressivism = Totalitarianism

59 minutes ago 1 Like Like Reply



DoctorsOrders

People walk out of their doctor's office with a condition and a prescription. General Anxiety Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder. For a medically diagnosed condition, you are taught to take medicine. Medicine given to you by a doctor. This class of medicine simply does not work in the majority of cases. In fact, it makes things worse. If you think it's doing you good and this is all heresy then stay on them a few more years and tell me how you feel then.

1 hour ago 1 Like Like Reply



hongryhawg

God, Janet Marshall, you're stupid. Of course your baby was born an addict. Don't blame the doctors or the government. Nobody held a gun to your head and made you take it. You weren't robbed of being a good mother. You robbed your kids of a good mother because you chose your drug over them. And now it's, "It's not my fault. Let me blame everyone but the person whose fault it is, mine."

1 hour ago 6 Likes Like Reply



another_engineer

I would like to see the origin of birth of most of these "doctors". It would explain alot. The disdain for US citizens amongst foreign doctors is quite evident.

1 hour ago 3 Likes Like Reply



Randall

yes, go to rehab and be detoxed off benzos in 6 days is hell

2 hours ago 1 Like Like Reply



Maple_Syrup

Personal responsibility anyone? I am not saying that clinicians and pharmacists should be relieved of their responsibilities. However those who cant be bothered to keep informed about things they put into their own bodies probably deserve what is coming. It both shocks and surprises me that such dim witted ppl have survived

on this planet thus long without collapsing from sheer stupidity and ignorance.

2 hours ago 12 Likes

Like Reply



Randall

you have no clue to addiction or anxiety
go preach your holier than others somewhere else

1 hour ago

Like Reply

in reply to Maple_Syrup 2 Likes



Manfarang

This is not alcohol or speed we are talking about.
A GP is supposed to be a professional, someone
with knowledge and integrity whom the patient
can trust.

2 hours ago

Like Reply

in reply to Maple_Syrup 2 Likes



NEWSNITE

I won't have a word said against my G.P. Only the other
day I went to see him and told him I thought I was
paranoid but he told me I was just imagining it!

2 hours ago 4 Likes

Like Reply



NEWSNITE

A doctor does not compel you to take medication. As
usual someone out to make a quick buck, this time at the
taxpayer's expense; it's enough to make doctors sick!

2 hours ago 6 Likes

Like Reply



isaffa

I have taken Valium/Temazepam and other benzos for a
number of years for chronic insomnia. I am well aware
every time I go to the doctors that I
am essentially seeking drugs, I see this as my decision
and know the benefits and risks of taking them. I would
like to think I am very clued up with the mechanism of
action/health problems and the addictive potential of
benzos, I would hope that anyone who also has been
putting a tablet down their thoughts for a period of time
would have the common sense to do some research and
weigh up the risks and benefits. It is disgusting that
doctors can even be held financially liable for these
prescriptions especially since guidelines strictly
recommend that a long term user not to be cut off cold
turkey and if a user goes back to their doctor complaining
of withdrawal symptoms the doctor dosent have many
other options other than giving them another
prescription and possibly referring them to a clinic.
I think the answer is to try to minimize the number of
new prescriptions but as a long term user I do not hold
my doctor at all responsible to repeat prescriptions. I

keep my dose the same and only take them when I need them.

2 hours ago 10 Likes

Like Reply



1Reasonable1

Thank you for the intelligent response. Indeed the federal regulatory agencies and trial lawyers in the U.S.A. have been fostering a "blame the physician" approach in matters related to controlled drug dependence and addiction problems, leading to a chilling effect on doctors providing these drugs to appropriate patients. Soon enough most physicians will simply refuse these medications to patients and suffering will increase unabated. Personal responsibility has vanished to victim status in the once great Republic of the United States- no longer the land of the free or brave...

1 hour ago in reply to isaffa

Like Reply

2 Likes



George James Sepel

Over the counter "Melatonin Plus", works great for insomnia. And, is not addicting.

1 hour ago in reply to isaffa

Like Reply



Daniel Martin Gray, American Citizen Born Abr...

Pharmaceutical mind and mood altering chemicals are of dubious utility, and present dangers that far outweigh benefits.

Rather than finding concrete behavioral steps to solve life's problems, we lazily turn to drugs as a quick fix, but they are not the panacea we were expecting.

Change your life. Diet, exercise, biofeedback all can work. Change jobs, partners, or get religion. Do charity work, play music, make love, or whatever it takes to safely cope.

Oh, and talk therapy is good for those who aren't aware of the source of their problems, but if it runs longer than six months or so, you're being had...

2 hours ago 11 Likes

Like Reply



Randall

before benzos people were locked up as looney, when used with monitoring they are a Godsend

1 hour ago
in reply to Daniel Martin Gray

Like Reply

2 Likes



angrydave

Great post.

2 hours ago [Like](#) [Reply](#)
in reply to Daniel Martin Gray



Michael O'Hara

who are these doctors? I have a shoulder injury that I have to take Tramadol for, which is a very weak painkiller, and it is like pulling teeth to get refills for it.

2 hours ago [4 Likes](#) [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Dunnyveg

This is ridiculous. It has been common knowledge since at least the sixties that Valium is very addictive. Even if these doctors didn't make this very clear, the consumer has a responsibility to keep up with things.

3 hours ago [14 Likes](#) [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Nom Deguerre

I take it you do not smoke, take alcohol or indulge in trans-fats then Dunnyveg?

All the plastics in your house must be BPA free, and dental fillings without mercury.

Were a honest and open media, and Government regulation that erred on the side of caution to exist - then perhaps a duty of care could be placed on the individual.

Until that day we rely on professionals to guide us on specific matters in their field.

3 hours ago [in reply to Dunnyveg](#) [Like](#) [Reply](#)
[3 Likes](#)



Thieves and crooks

I am guessing that a lot of people reading this article will have related personal concerns.

So...hopefully this will help:I was looking for an apposite quote from Freud, but can't find it offhand.

To paraphrase "Most doctors have no appreciable knowledge when it comes to matters of the mind - and that includes most psychiatrists."

If you have tangible emotional problems then what on earth are you doing, going to see a doctor?

I'd rather call a fishing tackle shop to help with a serious leak in the kitchen.

The answer lies not in these disgusting drugs (and the power and profits therein) but in making a series of visits to a therapist who does talking therapy.

Since I have been reading psychology and analysis for nearly 20 years I can tell you without any hesitation that hypnoanalysis is the best form of psychotherapy available.

Not only that, it will never be supplanted by any other form of therapy in the future - it can only be improved upon,in itself.

The vast majority of people have had 1 or 2 unfortunate

emotionally charged experiences in their childhood - sometimes 3 repressed experiences are discovered in analysis using hypnosis . Hypnoanalysts are better and better trained nowadays, so that the therapy can normally be completed in 8 sessions or less. So then you are cured of your emotional problems when the emotions are released!

I have just given you the best advice of your life - what shall you do with it?!

Are you a big pharma slaveor would you rather become your beautiful true self?

3 hours ago 4 Likes

Like Reply



NEWSNITE

Yes, it's all in the mind, a placebo is just as good. For many people it's a call for attention!

2 hours ago
in reply to Thieves and crooks

Like Reply



Thieves and crooks

"Time spent with cats is never wasted".
Sigmund Freud.

2 hours ago
in reply to NEWSNITE
4 Likes

Like Reply



NEWSNITE

Very therapeutic.....

48 minutes ago
in reply to Thieves
and crooks
1 Like

Like Reply



Mitchell F.

I have used valium for years for a medical condition known as a severe tremor. I have taken it for years and I currently only use 10mg per day at the most. At one time I was taking twice that and cut my dose in half. The important thing is do not raise your dose! You are going to have good days and bad days but do not take more on the bad days. If you can quit taking them quit. But even at 10mg or less per day it would be tough for me to completely quit simply because of my condition. When strangers ask why you are shaking so bad it becomes an embarrassment and a hinderance to life.

3 hours ago 3 Likes

Like Reply



NEWSNITE

Have a few bebies or try a placebo instead!

2 hours ago
in reply to Mitchell F.
1 Like

Like Reply



Sissy

Anyone with a pea sized brian or bigger (that counts out liberals) knows from all the TV adverts that these new prescription drugs are worse than the cure.

3 hours ago 4 Likes

Like Reply



Nom Deguerre

Numerous studies show those with right-wing tenancies have larger amygdala – a primitive part of the brain associated with emotion.

Emotion is not the best driver of rational debate.

3 hours ago in reply to Sissy
4 Likes

Like Reply



keyboardtapper

I read those studies and it was those with leftist tendencies - leftists are more likely to have frontal lobe damage too.

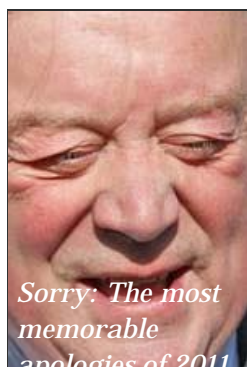
2 hours ago
in reply to Nom Deguerre
1 Like

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