



Is A UK Anxiety Drug Causing Overdoses Through Addiction?

Description

UK : Its generic pharmaceutical name is Pregabalin. Although you may know it by one of its brand names: there's Alzain, Axalid and Lyrica It's a drug that's prescribed for three very different reasons.

As an anticonvulsant used to treat people with epilepsy. It's also used to alleviate pain. Mostly, however, it's used to help with anxiety and depression. That's quite an impressive CV for a single medication.

But there's a problem. In fact, there's more than one.

Firstly, it's highly addictive.

When it was originally introduced to the UK market back in 2004, the Pfizer product was heralded as something of a miracle drug; an ideal substitute for the nasty addictive opioids that would go on to cause such horrific problems in the US.

These claims, it appears, were somewhat wide of the mark.

Pfizer's Pregabalin was approved for use two decades ago but the full extent of its hazards are only just coming to light.

Pregabalin was prescribed to more than 8.5 million people in England in 2022 alone, with many people reporting that the medication made their symptoms – and lives – noticeably better.

However, some medical professionals think that the drug's hazards aren't being adequately taken into account and this is causing widespread dependence on the drug.

Partly due to their efficacy, Pregabalin and other antidepressant prescriptions are increasing, with around a quarter of all patients that receive a prescription getting meds that might well lead to some sort of dependency.

Prescription rates for Pregabalin and similar drugs are greater in poorer communities, where anxiety and chronic pain are more commonly reported.

According to medical professionals, people with high levels of anxiety and depression are frequently administered Pregabalin due to difficulties linking therapeutic solutions with those people that need it.

Basically, if you live in a deprived area, therapy's difficult to arrange. Pills are not. The over-prescription of addictive anti-depressants is a huge problem.

Another, even bigger problem, is death. Rising reports of fatalities are starting to seriously worry the British medical community.

A recent Sunday Times investigation found that Pregabalin had the fastest-rising mortality rate of any drug currently prescribed in the UK. It's now flagged up in a third of all drug-related fatalities.

That is a significant and hugely concerning statistic.

Back in 2012, Pregabalin was noted on just nine death certificates in the UK. A decade later, that number had climbed to 779. A shocking 3,400 fatalities have been linked to Pregabalin in the past five years.

Pregabalin was legally classified as a class C drug five years ago. That means it's now unlawful to sell or possess the medication without a proper prescription. Of course, this hasn't stopped a growing black market emerging for those hooked on the stuff.

'The New Valium', as it's been called by some, has even found its way onto the radar of recreational drug users due to its sedative properties. But when mixed with other drugs, Pregabalin can lead to overdoses.

Doctors are warning users that Pregabalin is much more addictive than previously warned. Is Pregabalin the same as Gabapentin?

Sold under the brand name Neurontin, Gabapentin is also used to treat epilepsy, nerve pain, depression and anxiety.

It's very similar to Pregabalin, given that it's also a 'gabapentinoid'. It's not the same, however. The two are not 'interchangeable' – you couldn't swap between them. Or at least it's not advisable to do so.

In large doses, Pregabalin is more dangerous than Gabapentin.

What shouldn't you take with Pregabalin?

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) offer up a full 134 'possible interactions', but – really – the main things to avoid when taking the drug is alcohol and antidepressants that are 'selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors' (SSRIs).

Benzodiazepines such as Diazepam and Lorazepam, as well as opioids such as morphine, can enhance the sedative effects of Pregabalin. So they should also be avoided.

What are the side effects of Pregabalin and does it cause withdrawal?

Pregabalin can also cause side effects. Although this is true of most pharmaceutical drugs and very few people will experience any – or even one – of these ill effects.

The most common side effects – which the NHS say are ‘usually mild and go away by themselves’ include: headaches, nausea, fatigue, mood swings, diarrhoea, dizzy spells, blurred vision, swollen limbs, erectile disfunction, memory issues, weight gain and a loss of blood sugar control in diabetics.

Stopping a course of Pregabalin abruptly can cause withdrawal, so it’s really not advisable. A gradual ‘weening off’ process is advised by doctors.

If you’re worried about your use or dependence on pregabalin – or any other prescription or non-prescription drugs or medication – talk to your local GP.

by Derek Knauss

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