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Title	Challenges in deprescribing for young chronic benzodiazepine patients
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Publication date	2017-01-27
Original Citation	Murphy, K., Lambert, S., McCarthy, S., Byrne, S. and Sahm, L. (2017) 'Challenges in Deprescribing for Young Chronic Benzodiazepine Patients,' Prescribing and Research in Medicines Management Conference, PRIMM 28th Annual Scientific Meeting, Deprescribing – is less more?, London, UK, 27th January.
Type of publication	Conference item
Link to publisher's version	http://www.primm.eu.com/?page_id=730, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pds.4221
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Download date	2026-11-06 04:16:06
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/5886

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Challenges in deprescribing benzodiazepines for young chronic benzodiazepine patients

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BACKGROUND

- **50%** increase in benzodiazepine (BZD) misuse amongst European 15-16 year-olds, 2003 – 2011[1,2]
- **3%** of young people misused BZDs in Ireland in 2011[3]
- **7 days** of continuous BZD use can lead to dependence in children[4]
- Impaired perception of risks in adolescent decision-making due to incomplete neurological development[5]

General Practitioners (GPs): collaborate with patients to use BZDs appropriately	Youth Counsellors (YCs): can maturely reflect patient perspective in GP consultations

RATIONALE: Both observe patterns of behaviour of which the other might not be aware

AIM: Describe the challenges of deprescribing BZDs for young chronic BZD patients in the community

METHODS

- Local ethical committee approval obtained
- Semi-structured interviews occurred between June and December 2013

Interviewee Demographics

Profession	**GP**: 7 | **YC**: 10
Gender	**M**: 9 | **F**: 8
Age (yrs)	**≤40**: 7 | **>40**: 10
Experience (yrs)	**≤10**: 6 | **>10**: 11

RESULTS

PATIENT FACTORS

Patient threats

"I'll go out of here and I'll have a seizure and it'll be on your head doctor" (GP03)

Eliciting sympathy

"...just tell him...you're feeling depressed or feeling suicidal, you can't sleep. Just tell him that and he'll...write you the script" (YC09)

Doctor shopping

"3 or 4 doctors...what we find here is that you'll have a gang, say 4 or 5 people like. They'll all have scripts" (YC09)

MEDICATION FACTORS

Legitimate use

"...muscle relaxants in situations...like whiplash and torticollis, where they have acute muscle spasm" (GP07)

...

Effective medication

"...wish they didn't exist on the market...in many ways, they're too good" (GP01)

PROFESSIONAL FACTORS

Continuation from previous prescribers

"...my other doctor gave me these and there was no problem and they were great and what are you talking about now" (GP07)

Lack of alternatives

"...in the real world of general practice the pressure on a general practitioner to prescribe is almost always driven...by the lack of alternative support therapies" (GP05)

PRESSURE TO PRESCRIBE

ALLEVIATING FACTORS

Alternatives

"I think if there was a therapist within each practice, it might prevent the...high level of prescribing of benzos" (YC03)

Restrictions

"...make the availability of benzodiazepines...much harder" (GP02)

Patient education

"...datasheets need to be...simplistic not legalistic...this is a habit-forming drug...this drug will...work less every time you use it. Why not talk to your pharmacist or your doctor about it" (GP04)

CONCLUSIONS

- GPs and YCs identified different factors about BZD use in young patients
- Reductions in BZD usage will only succeed through co-operation between all stakeholders including patients, the medical profession, regulators, and the government
- Further research should be conducted to assess the patient benefits and monetary benefits of BZD reduction interventions

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank the Irish College of General Practitioners and the Cork Local Drugs Task Force for their assistance with recruitment.

References available on request

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