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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<sup>1,2</sup>
- **3%** of young people misused BZDs in Ireland in 2011<sup>3</sup>
- **7 days** of continuous BZD use can lead to dependence in children<sup>4</sup>
- Impaired perception of risks in adolescent decision-making due to incomplete neurological development<sup>5</sup>

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	<b>GP:</b> 7   <b>YC:</b> 10
Gender	<b>M:</b> 9   <b>F:</b> 8
Age (yrs)	<b>≤40:</b> 7   <b>&gt;40:</b> 10
Experience (yrs)	<b>≤10:</b> 6   <b>&gt;10:</b> 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