

PE1651/CC

David Healy submission of 4 January 2018

Ten per cent of the population of Scotland takes an antidepressant on prescription. Of those between 80 and 90% are on treatment for more than a year - many for over a decade. When the latest antidepressants were introduced around 1990 the recommendation was that they would be used for 3-6 months. Apologists for the drugs say treatment for over a year is a good thing. Its not. Its caused by dependence and it continues because so many people attempting to stop feel so bad they continue with treatment.

The marketing of these drugs targeted women of child-bearing years, although companies knew from the start the drugs were likely to lead to dependence and to birth defects, from major organ defects to behaviour abnormalities such as autistic spectrum disorder.

While treatments can be helpful, the evidence for true benefits when used in general practice is missing. The drugs are now the most commonly used medications by women in their teens and early twenties, the child-bearing years, and in these age groups there is no evidence for benefit. Because of the dependence the drugs cause, many young women are trapped into pregnancies in which their unborn babies are exposed to a teratogen because stopping is so difficult. There is no benefit to the woman for the most part or her child in any instance.

For all too many, women in particular, antidepressants turn out to be a gateway drug, into treatment with mood-stabilizers and other drugs or for antidepressant induced alcoholism or antidepressant induced osteoporosis or other conditions.

There is a pressing need to understand antidepressant dependence - how to avoid it and how best to manage it.

At present rates of antidepressant use among adolescents in Scotland, especially among women, is rocketing. These drugs are or are on their way to being the most commonly used prescription drugs by Scottish adolescents. There is no evidence of efficacy to support this use and compelling evidence for harms, especially self-harm.

Linked into the above, there is a further factor to bear in mind which is that pretty well the entire literature on these drugs is ghost-written, with the brief of the ghost-writers being to produce good marketing copy. There is no access to any of the data behind studies that may have been undertaken on these drugs, some of which have been conducted in Scotland. The MHRA have not seen the raw data and the Scottish Parliament cannot get access to the data behind these studies should Parliament request it. You should judge any comments of doctors or others apparently supporting the use of antidepressants against this background.