

PE1651/JJJ

Sandra Minshull submission of 7 January 2018

Over the last 42 years, with the exception of 2 or 3 doctors I have found myself in a constant battle with the medical profession. My story starts in 1974, age 14, when I suffered unusual signs and symptoms after a thyroidectomy in which unbeknown to me my parathyroid gland was damaged. I became extremely anxious and subsequently was put on Lorazepam. At age 16, 1976, my GP stopped the Lorazepam abruptly. After a week of going cold turkey, having horrific withdrawal symptoms and no support, I had a seizure. A GP started me back on Lorazepam which I was then left on for a further 20 years. Eventually, in 1996, I managed to come off the Lorazepam with intense counselling from my GP, although he was treating me for anxiety and depression, I was put on a sedative antidepressant for 3 years to help with sleep disturbances, but over time my health problems increased as I withdrew from the antidepressants. All the withdrawal symptoms came back, sleep disturbances, muscle weakness, fatigue, double vision etc. I was referred to numerous hospital consultants to find out what was causing my symptoms and I was actually treated for myasthenia gravis for a while. It was then decided that I didn't have it. So the search for a diagnosis went on until 2015 when a drug support worker from the Bridge Project, Bradford, confirmed that my symptoms were common with long term benzodiazepine use. I was referred to another neurologist in 2016 as I had started with an intermittent head tremor. I went armed with all the evidence of the harm benzodiazepines can cause. When I mentioned this to the neurologist he said he couldn't comment as he didn't know enough about it. My GP, although was more supportive, gave the same reply. I was later diagnosed with Dystonia. My most recent appointment was with a rheumatologist in 2017 about my muscle weakness and joint aches and pains. When I tried to get across that my symptoms are common when taking Lorazepam for years, she didn't say anything, just rolled her eyes. In the letter she wrote to my GP, she states that I have a fixation on Lorazepam been the cause of my problems, which has made me extremely angry, as due to the debilitating effects the drugs have had on my life, unable to finish education or hold down a job as I was either sacked or asked to leave due to health problems caused by tolerance and addiction to the prescribed drug. It destroyed the relationship with my parents as they had no understanding of what happened to their outgoing, carefree, confident, happy daughter. Through the years it also affected my 3 sons as we were unable to go on family holidays or social outings. Now because of protracted withdrawal, I miss out on so much with my grandchildren. I now have amazing support from my drugs support worker. Also through reading other peoples stories and speaking to people that have been affected by addiction to prescribed drugs, I know I am certainly not alone.