

PE1651/NN

Gail Seddon submission of 5 January 2018

I am writing to share my experience of taking SSRI (antidepressant medication) from late May 2016 to early February 2017.

I approached my GP in Southern England in May 2016, suffering with an acute onset of insomnia & anxiety over some long buried emotions relating to the death of my Father some 11 years previously.

My anxiety was triggered by attending a Mindfulness course and a build of job-related stress & adrenal fatigue in the preceding 18 months to 2 1/2 years.

Initially, I requested not to take an antidepressant as I had a had a very negative experience whilst taking Paroxetine for a 2 day period in January of 1999. The Paroxetine had caused intense electrical fizzing throughout my peripheral nervous system and I concluded that this was intolerable & I was better off without the tablets. I subsequently went to see a psychotherapist and had a really constructive period of exploration of what had caused my low mood, which left me emotionally resilient and more self aware.

In May of last year, the GP initially prescribed a 2-4 week supply of zopiclone which is a sleep drug. This was helpful in helping me get to sleep but not helpful in sustaining a full night's sleep. In desperation due to my fear of not sleeping & my increasing anxiety, I returned to see another GP at the practice and requested to start on an antidepressant, thinking this would help me to get through the worst of a rough patch & address the underlying causes through counselling sessions as needed. Having 2 primary school children also made me feel that I needed to be able to function effectively to support them through school exams and other tests.

What followed the commencement of the antidepressant was as follows:

- Increased suicidal thoughts & on daily basis ideation for short periods.
- Profuse sweating - predominantly at night time
- Numbing of emotions - unable to cry but instead any attempt to express tears resultant in my throat "barking like a dog".
- Heightened anxiety - off the scale to point where after 6 weeks on the SSRI, I felt unable to be on my own for longer than 1-1/2 hours, unable to drive further than 1/2 mile from home.
- Completely unable to interact socially more than basic mumbblings.
- Difficulty undertaking shopping & basic tasks in busy environments.

After 2 1/2 weeks, I returned to the GP and requested a change of SSRI & switched to sertraline from citalopram. This was further anxiety heightening and led to severe

gastro-intestinal symptoms. I lost over 2 stone of weight in the first 2-3 weeks on SSRI medication due to sweating & shaking.

At all stages on the medication in the first 2 months, I was told by the medical profession, that it was my underlying depression that was causing the symptoms & I knew this was not the case. After 6 months, I had a genetic screening undertaken by a specialised lab in the Netherlands and this highlighted that one of the key liver enzymes which metabolises these medications, was an intermediate metaboliser and hence I was likely receiving far too much medication for my genetic type & the safest course of action would have been to taper me off all the tablets prescribed in a slow & steady manner.

Adverse effects for me got a lot worse before they started to lift. I had the dose I was taking doubled & then tripled within 8 days. Hence the adverse effects became intolerable, intense internal restlessness - known as akathisia meant that I struggled to stay sitting for any length of time, visual hallucination (1 incidence) & auditory voices (several incidences). These symptoms were most likely caused by interaction of sleeping drugs (7.5mg dose), addition of atypical antipsychotic for a 8-10 day period which was prescribed to "lift my mood" & very rapid & intense dose changes.

It was on reading Katinka Blackford Newman's book *The Pill That Steals* that the penny finally dropped for me. From that point forth, I was able to read every medical paper publically available on antidepressants, dosage & serotonin inhibition rates etc and began to read around the *Critical Psychiatry Literature* by authors such as Prof Dr David Healey and *Anatomy of an Epidemic* by Robert Whitaker.

I consider myself to be very fortunate in that I had love & support from my husband, great support from close friends & the benefit of time & lack of financial pressure, which enabled me to wean myself of the SSRI & SSANA (Mirtazipine) that I ended up on. I was on an SSRI for just over 4 months, before I initiated my taper from 150mg & I had at the time moderate support from the GP Practice. I continued to feel dramatically better physically with each cut in the medication I made & I spent time & resource investing in high quality B vitamin, zinc & Omega 3 oil supplements to support my brain's recovery from SSRI's. I took my taper very steadily & completed it in just over 4 months.

I think this timeframe is quite indicative of just how potent these medications are. For any patient who has been on SSRI medication for a period of 2-5 years, the taper done effectively, could take from 1-5 years & the patient may still experience withdrawal symptoms for several years after.

I have been medication free for 11 months now and feel very lucky to be so well considering my incredibly negative experience with SSRI's. I will never touch them

again in my life and will ensure that close friends & family have all the facts they need before they ever consider taking a neurotoxin in the form of an antidepressant.

I wish the committee to have wisdom and the foresight to be able to understand what a huge problem we have with Prescribed Drug Dependence & Withdrawal in the UK. I would be happy to contribute to any ongoing work that involves lived experience or Former SSRI prescribed patient forums.

My hope would be for patients prescribed medications that have been unsuitable for them to receive full support in a safe, nutritionally supported taper with access to supported schemes to allow these deserving people to enter the voluntary & paid work sectors at the appropriate point in their recovery.