

## **PE1651/V**

Angela Forrester submission of 4 January 2018

I was first prescribed the SSRI Paroxetine in January 2000 by my G.P. after going to her due to ongoing anxiety and depression which had been worsened by a traumatic event. I had been reluctant to take any drugs of this kind, and asked if I could be referred for Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, as this had been very beneficial to me a few years previously, my depression had gone into remission thanks to it and I had been working abroad and living a normal life. My request for CBT was turned down, and instead it was suggested to me that an antidepressant was my best option at that time.

Trusting the medical profession, I duly took my starting dose of Paroxetine, and within a month or two I did feel a lot better, even unnaturally happy and euphoric at times. This was not to last however, as within about four months of treatment I started to experience very unpleasant side effects such as extreme tiredness and lethargy, dizziness and a feeling of weakness. I started to feel "lazy" and was no longer interested in the hiking and running which I had enjoyed before and which had helped me before with my anxiety and depression. I returned to my G.P. and voiced my concerns about these side effects. Their answer was to try me on a different SSRI, namely Citalopram, as apparently this was a newer drug and had fewer side effects.

This couldn't have proved further from the truth for me. The first dose did not have enough antidepressant effect on me so I was increased to a higher dose. This improved my depressive symptoms but the side effects of lethargy, sedation and weakness were even worse than those that I had experienced on Paroxetine. To make matters even worse for me, this drug seemed to cause an increase in my appetite, and I started to crave sweet and carbohydrate foods more than ever. Needless to say I put on at least two stones in one year, which anyone could understand made me feel bad about myself and caused depressed feelings!

Desperate to put an end to the feeling of exhaustion and lethargy which made my body feel heavy and made day to day life a constant struggle, I asked my G.P. whether I could consider tapering off the Citalopram slowly under his guidance. He agreed, and I tapered off very slowly over a few months.

However despite my tapering being slow and done with a professional, little did I know how hellish I would feel during and after these months of reducing my dose. I started to have panic, anxiety and depression which were a lot worse than any of the symptoms I had had before going on any drugs at all. I had vision problems and I was so anxious and depressed that I had to go on sick leave from my job. I was unable to function normally and had to rely on my family for support. When I discussed this with my GP he said that the symptoms I was experiencing were simply evidence of my depression and anxiety getting worse, and never did it occur to him that I might be experiencing withdrawal symptoms from SSRI's – a syndrome which has since been recognised as existing condition by a number of leading medical professionals.

After a few months of being off the Citalopram the anxiety and irritable mood symptoms I had seemed to subside slightly, and I started to hope that I was recovering and would be able to return to a normal working life. However approximately 3 months after discontinuing, I started to feel hypersensitive to everything in the world, especially to noise and stress. It felt as if my outer protective layer that shielded me from stress was gone. It is a feeling that I never had before I

was put on SSRI's. I cried nearly every day even though there was not much to cry about, I couldn't enjoy anything in life, even things I had once enjoyed such as a summer holiday in Turkey which normally would have been the best two weeks in the year for me. I remember going on a boat trip there, which is normally the thing I love to do most, and being in tears for most of it, feeling an intense sadness and feeling that people didn't like me. These were also symptoms I never had before being put on SSRI's. I also felt irritable all the time, and the slightest "stress" could cause shouting and a fit of temper, which as you can imagine damaged a lot of my relationships, both personal and at work.

That summer I felt a sense of impending doom all the time, my social anxiety was worse than it had ever been before the tablets, I felt people were hostile to me and I lost confidence in my abilities.

My increased lack of confidence in my professional skills obviously hurt my career, and when I was looking for a new job I found the feelings of gloom and pessimism and anxiety, and general feeling of foreboding ruined my ability to concentrate on applying for jobs.

In fact my general concentration and confidence in my professional skills and dealing with people was getting so bad that after years working as a bilingual secretary and administrator I would now only be able to do cleaning work or manual work.

My ability to handle any stress was completely removed, and any stress could cause a breakdown in tears or panic attack. In fact it is accurate to say that I was no longer capable of working and looking after myself.

Another later symptom which I had never experienced in the 26 years before I had taken SSRI's was an intense feeling of inner agitation and malaise, a feeling almost as if my nerves were on fire which meant I could never relax, concentrate and feel at ease. My mind was constantly on edge, filled with worries which later on looked ridiculous to me.

I also had problems sleeping at this stage in withdrawal. Unfortunately at this stage I had now enrolled on a Post Graduate Teaching Course, but these symptoms made it impossible for me to cope with the course work required and I had to withdraw from the course.

To put this into perspective, thanks to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy I had successfully completed a Degree in Modern Languages and a Post Graduate Diploma in European Business, and had also lived abroad independently for 2 years.

In summary, I believe that taking SSRI drugs has ruined my life, health and career, as the side effects of taking them were intolerable to me. When I tried to discontinue them to alleviate these symptoms I experienced a long lasting hell which I could never have imagined.

Currently my G.P. is recommending that I discontinue the Duloxetine which I am now taking and trying a MAOI type of antidepressant on me, as he believes the sedation and weight gain might not be so bad on this drug. I am however less than keen on this option, however due to my experience I believe that my brain chemistry has been adversely affected by the SSRI's and that my brain is now dependent on them. Their antidepressant effect has now lessened on me, and I effectively have to take them to feel in control of my emotions and gain some kind of self confidence and concentration and calmness. In effect they only work as a sedative.

I was told by a G. P. that SSRI's are "not addictive or habit forming". My experience is that they may not be addictive in the sense of cocaine etc, however they are dependence forming, as when you try to come off them you feel so unwell, anxious and unable to cope that you are forced to go back on them to gain peace of mind.

In my case this “peace of mind” comes at a very high price. Despite dieting and trying to eat healthily I am more than 2 stones overweight. I have an overwhelming urge to sleep most of the day, a feeling maybe akin to Narcolepsy. I have to have a huge intake of caffeine to keep me going through a busy day. I need at least 12 hours sleep a day to function, and even then might need to have a nap to feel ok.

I am unable to take part in fun runs, hiking and cycling in the way I did before, these activities used to help my mental health and self image, now I feel as if I have concrete weights on my limbs and am able only to do gentle walks.

I have constant heartburn and indigestion and the G.p. has stated that this is caused by my medication.

I am on no other medication, and have had numerous blood tests to see if the fatigue and lethargy could be caused by a physical ailment. Nothing has been found by doctors, so there is no doubt these symptoms are caused by SSRI.

I am angry that I was not warned about how addictive these drugs can be, and how difficult they would be to come off. I was also not warned that my brain chemistry could be altered on them, and that if I tried to discontinue them I would feel more anxious, depressed and dysfunctional than I had ever been before I started them.

I am afraid that I will never be able to discontinue these drugs despite their awful effects on my health, and that I have been made into a drug addict by the Big Pharmaceutical companies who lobby our G.P.s.

I believe they are as addicting and habit forming as Benzodiazepines and should not be prescribed as a substitute for talking therapies.

I believe that If I had been offered a talking therapy 17 years ago instead of mind numbing, habit forming drugs that my life, career and health would be in a much better place now than it is.

I do of course realise that for some patients and mental health conditions drugs may be necessary, however SSRI's are being overprescribed and given out instead of offering alternative treatments.

I urge the Scottish Parliament to take action to prevent the widespread use of these drugs so that other do not have to suffer as I have in the future.