

PE1651/VV

Anonymous submission of 5 January 2018

I would like to submit my account of attempting to withdraw from the SNRI antidepressant drug Venlafaxine (effexor).

I am a 42 year old woman living in Fife. I have taken the medication exactly as prescribed and have never abused it.

I was prescribed the drug by a psychiatrist to treat depression and anxiety after other medications had been ineffective. He explained I would need a high dose as one of the active ingredients was only effective then. I eventually ended up taking 375mg a day of the drug. I took it for several years.

In 2016 it was decided I needed to come off the drug because of side effects developing. The plan had been for me to withdraw over a period of a few weeks.

The first few reductions in dose were difficult with brain zaps (a feeling of electric shocks in the brain) and zaps throughout my whole body when I walked. I would also experience bizarre and vivid dreams, nausea and night sweats. I needed to leave a lot longer than the psychiatrist recommended between drops as those symptoms lasted for around a month. I was told I could reduce in dose every 2 weeks.

When I got to later doses the withdrawal symptoms become intolerable, with my mental health deteriorating as well as the physical symptoms. After reducing from 37.5mg to half a 37.5mg tablet my depression got out of control. I experienced uncontrollable rage which is completely out of character for me and included me screaming and shouting at people. The worst rage ended up with me kicking and throwing things around and then stormed out of the house in a deeply suicidal frame of mind. I drove past some woods and then had the idea of hanging myself and drove to the 24 hour supermarket to buy rope. Instead I sat in the car park thinking of ramming my car into things before phoning someone.

It was after this meltdown that I saw my GP. Her response was to increase the venlafaxine again which would have just made withdrawing harder in the long term. I ended up needing to take a second antidepressant drug to help with the symptoms of withdrawal.

I feel like I am stuck on this medication now. Whenever I am late with a single dose I experience extreme brain zaps and more worryingly twitchy eyes which makes me worried I am going to have a seizure.

Drs do not recognise how bad antidepressant withdrawal can be for some people and instead dismiss their symptoms or attribute them to a return of depression. They tell patients to withdraw too quickly when the brain and body needs time to adjust to changes in medication after long term use.

I have had to turn to the internet to find out more about how to safely withdraw from venlafaxine and my psychiatrist has now prescribed liquid venlafaxine and is allowing me to taper very slowly after me showing him information I found online. It

should not be up to the patient to research their own symptoms and find their own cure. What happens to the patients who do not have that information to hand?