

PE1651/FFFFFFFFF

Anonymous submission of 15 February 2018

I was initially prescribed a benzodiazepine at the age of 20 by my GP for mild situational anxiety which I believe could have been resolved through therapy and changes to my situation. I was later prescribed Prozac (fluoxetine) and then Seroxat (paroxetine) for mild anxiety and what was labelled as depression. I was on antidepressants for 8.5 years.

I sought out counselling and therapy to deal with these issues whilst I was taking antidepressants.

After tapering off Seroxat (paroxetine) I experienced a severe, protracted withdrawal.

Withdrawal Symptoms:

- Repetitive, racing thoughts and memories. These were at times continuous - I was unable to experience any peace or relief. Situations would repeat on a loop in my head - this was extremely distressing.
- Strong sudden intrusive thoughts
- Insomnia and sleep disruption - early waking and/or being unable to sleep for hours which was very debilitating
- Experiencing a sudden intrusive thought upon waking
- Waking abruptly and with a sense of shock
- Whole body sensation of being severely 'on edge' and physically agitated - this was at times unbearable
- Free floating fear unrelated to any thoughts or normal occurring emotions
- Magnified emotions
- Heightened emotional sensitivity
- Ability to deal with any sort of stress was very impaired
- Inability to deal with confrontation
- Initial loss of appetite
- Strange leg sensation
- Weird sense of pressure and tightness at the top of my head
- Brain felt physically raw
- One incidence of experiencing what appeared like a light flashing in my brain
- One incidence of vertigo
- A feeling similar to a sort of depression but far worse and very different in nature to anything I had experienced before - like a black hole which could come on suddenly out of nowhere
- Feeling overwhelmed by stimulus
- Feeling vulnerable and emotionally raw
- At times difficulty in focusing and concentrating
- Impulsive feelings and reactions
- Labile mood
- Anger
- A flu-like feeling unrelated to any real flu/colds
- Impaired immune system - five bad cold viruses in first year of withdrawal

- Physically exhausted
- Lack of motivation
- PMS exacerbated
- Creativity badly affected
- Experience of 'windows' where symptoms let up and I felt okay/good

I would like to make it clear that I have never in my life experienced anything like this before - either in nature or severity. Also, I had always slept very well prior to taking antidepressants and benzodiazepines.

In latter years:

Good periods or 'windows' where I was symptom-free gradually increased and lengthened.

Withdrawal symptoms occurred in a pattern of waves.

Currently at 12 years after my last dose, I am virtually healed. For the vast majority of time, I have no symptoms at all and feel better than I did prior to starting antidepressants and benzodiazepines.

At 12 years out I have:

- Mild sleep issues
- Occasional weird leg sensations lasting for a few seconds or minutes at a time

A lot of stress or confrontation can bring on what remains of these symptoms:

A few intrusive thoughts

- Slight sleep disturbance
- Magnified emotions - I feel my emotions are not totally down to baseline level (prior to drugs)

Overall, I have experienced massive improvements in my ability to deal with stress.

I feel some trauma from going through withdrawal. I am also dealing with the impact that withdrawal has had on my life.

I am in the process of rebuilding my life.

What needs to happen:

Effective support for those in withdrawal starting with a 24 hour helpline for those suffering withdrawal from prescribed drugs and for those that wish to withdraw safely from prescribed drugs. This could lead to specialized centres for people experiencing withdrawal.

Effective support to help people to rebuild their lives after withdrawal.

Recognition that withdrawal from antidepressants, benzodiazepines and other psych drugs does exist and can be far worse than any original symptoms.

Recognition of prolonged or protracted withdrawal with acknowledgement that withdrawal can last for weeks, months or years.

Recognition of the massive impact that withdrawal can have on people's lives and ability to thrive. Withdrawal can be incredibly devastating and debilitating. People often cannot work or are forced to take on less demanding roles or less hours. Relationships with family and friends are affected.

Recognition that denial of the existence of withdrawal can be upsetting and traumatizing.

Awareness that the expression of emotion is not a weakness and can be the catalyst for recovery and good health.

There is an urgent need for a totally different approach to emotional distress. We need to look at the root causes for the way that an individual is feeling. Experiencing anxiety, depression or strong emotion is not a disease, nor is it a chemical imbalance. Often these experiences are a totally natural response to unreasonable, difficult or untenable circumstances; or to past trauma.

Services need to be trauma-informed and to follow a holistic approach; looking at lifestyle, exercise, nutrition, past trauma and experience. Possible solutions could involve therapy; counselling; Yoga; bodywork; Shiatsu; alternative therapies and changes to lifestyle and support structure.

Proper financial support for those experiencing withdrawal.

An apology.