

## **PE1651/KKKKK**

Jarret Cameron Burke submission of 29 January 2018

I am submitting my experience with benzodiazepines in the hopes that my story will help impact legal changes in Scotland, and thus follow suit in my own country of Canada.

I was originally prescribed the drug for anxiety at 13 years old. I was given Ativan 1mg, twice daily. At 18 years old, I was switched to Klonopin (same dosage) because I was tolerant to the Ativan. But it would be another six years (aged 24) that the full effects of my dependence to benzodiazepines showed. I felt sick all the time, mentally and physically. I was seeing doctors weekly, from family doctors to naturopaths to psychologists to psychologists. I had severe depression and anxiety (much, much worse than when I started the drug), and physically I was always in pain, tired and weak.

It's at this time I tried to stop the drug and my entire life spiralled out of control and is not yet back to normal (I'm now 34 years old). I became suicidal, even more depressed, anxious to the point of paranoia and hallucinations, suffered mild seizures, began bleeding internally, was in tremendous physical pain all over my body, and was unable to physically take care of myself. There are dozens of symptoms that occurred when I tried to quit these drugs, but these are the major ones, the ones that left me totally disabled. I had to leave graduate school (which I completed from home thankfully) and I've not been able to use my education to find meaningful employment since.

I was then told by doctors that I'd have to be on benzodiazepines for the rest of my life as my "anxiety" was so bad. Not one doctor realized I was in crippling withdrawal from a highly addictive drug. So, I continued my use of benzos until I was 32 years old, when I finally found a psychiatrist who told me that these drugs were killing me slowly. He tapered me off Klonopin over an 8 month period starting in March 2015 and I've been in recovery ever since.

I'm now 28 months off benzodiazepines. My brain and body were so dependant on these drugs that their removal from my system left me with what can only be called a brain injury, and so I call it a brain injury. I was unable to walk for 12 months, and there are days I still cannot. I couldn't stand long enough to shower or prepare food. My body shook (literally shook) for over nine months straight. The pain, nausea, insomnia, intrusive thoughts, hallucinations, small seizures etc, made me want to die everyday of my life until very recently.

I am now in recovery. I am healing. There is no doubt. But, these drugs cost me everything. I'm still unable to work. I struggle to feed and house myself. I'm isolated. When I do heal, I'll be starting life entirely from scratch with little support.

Throughout this entire journey there was not one doctor, social worker, government member, community member or any one else who believed what I was going through. They all said benzos were harmless and I was being difficult. Please pass this bill and undertake not only tackling the over prescription of tranquillizers but also

educate those people prescribing them and supporting people on the drugs. It's clear that doctors, until recently, were getting all their facts on benzos from the drug companies themselves.

People are and will die needlessly if such prescribing methods and treatment protocols are not changed.