

## PE1651/HHHHHH

Anonymous submission of 5 February 2018

I am a 60 year old female. Antidepressants for approximately 25 years.

I now believe that if I had received appropriate counselling and support and been taught, and used, non drug coping techniques that I would never have needed to take a psychiatric drug.

My background, year and age:

1976 – 19 – father died, broken engagement

1977 – 20 – mother remarried

1980 – 23 – married

1982 – 25 – 31 year old husband had mild heart attack

1985 – 28 – unexpected emergency caesarean

1987 – 30 – husband open heart surgery for 4 bypasses, ended up having 7

1988 – 30 – caesarean after trial labour

1992? 35 – **first antidepressant use**

1994 – 37 – husband home permanently – Wegners Granulomatosis

1999 – 41 – husband's death

Originally prescribed **Prozac** which caused **weak muscles**. I ended up having trouble walking because it affected my hips like when you are pregnant and your ligaments loosen.

Long term **citalopram** prior to current one. Late 2010 to late 2011 I had about 5 major life stressors. I had a major breakdown at my daughter's wedding. From what I now know about ADs I think that the citalopram may have reached tolerance.

During 2012 I decided to **cold turkey** citalopram. **I felt great for a few months but then became very sick, basically bed ridden, for about 2 and ½ weeks with what felt like the flu with aches and pains but was not the flu. I had no appetite and had trouble eating and lost 8 kgs in weight.** From what I now know I believe that this was withdrawal from the cold turkey of citalopram.

Not long after this I was prescribed **Pristiq** 50mg. I was told by the psychologist that I would be on an antidepressant for life because it was like a **diabetic needs insulin**. I felt okay and had incredible focus but felt no pleasure in anything. The Pristiq dose was increased to 100mg. I started feeling more pleasure.

My **diastolic blood pressure rose** after increasing to 100mg Pristiq and my regular doctor did not make the association between the two and increased my BP medication.

Every now and then my heart would feel like it "flipped", which other people may use the term miss a beat.

Almost every day I would have a 2 hour sleep and still sleep through the night.

It wasn't until my dose got lower that I realised that I had been feeling constantly on edge and unsettled.

2015 I realised that I was sweating a lot in the middle of winter. I also had aches and pains. I began researching Pristiq side effects and realised that I was most likely suffering **serotonin toxicity**.

October 2015 I **reduced my dose from 100mg to 50mg Pristiq**. I experienced extreme cog/brain fog for 3 weeks and everything I did required my undivided attention, even walking. I began researching antidepressant withdrawal. That was when I discovered the website *survivingantidepressants.org*. Several days later **I was unable to type**. Being a professional typist since the age of 16 I knew that something wasn't right. It had been suggested by the website moderators that I increase my dose of Pristiq. When I couldn't type I **took extra Pristiq and after about 4 hours I was able to type again**. Because I had a benchmark I knew that it was because I had reduced my Pristiq too quickly.

In Australia Pristiq is only available in doses of 50mg and 100mg and the advice by Pfizer is that tablets should be taken whole. Thankfully other members on the Surviving Antidepressants forum had successfully cut Pristiq tablets and also had them compounded with slow release formula and experienced no problems. I was fortunate enough to locate a compounding pharmacy which has been compounding my Pristiq for me since November 2015. Surviving Antidepressants recommends tapering by **no more than 10% of the previous dose every 4 weeks**. I have been using this recommendation as a guideline for my taper.

After I updosed I held at 75mg for 2 months. I then attempted a 10% reduction. By the 3rd day I had intense and painful ear pressure and a front of brain headache. I realised that I could not continue to tolerate the pain and pressure and I updosed by 2.5 mg to 70 mg. This made a big difference. Again within a few hours I felt relief as the pressure subsided and I only had a very mild headache which lessened over the next few days. After 3 more weeks I reduced by 2.5 mg to 67.5 mg and only suffered tolerable ear pressure for a few days.

When I got to 50mg I held for 3 months. I did a 7 week hold at 20mg.

As my dose got lower I started to feel more like my old self. I started to realise how numbed my emotions had been over the many years on an antidepressant. In May 2017 I bought a new car and felt some excitement (25mg Pristiq) but it wasn't until September 2017 (19mg Pristiq) that I experienced real excitement and realised that back in May it had been a dulled excitement.

As at the beginning of February 2018 I am down to 13mg. Even though I have been tapering carefully I have still been experiencing withdrawal symptoms. Thankfully they are mild but there are times when I am unable to do certain things. It is mainly cognitive things which are affected but I do experience physical withdrawal symptoms as well. Trouble concentrating and reading, mild anxiety, random thoughts, appetite changes, muscle cramps, occasional sleep issues.

I appreciate the opportunity of relating my experience.