**FERNLEA SURGERY**

**HYPNOTICS (BENZODIAZEPINES AND Z-DRUGS) POLICY**

At Fernlea Surgery we recognize that benzodiazepines and other sedative drugs are highly addictive, even in short courses and are increasingly being associated with increased risk of dementia and early death. They are highly fatal in overdose.

When used in conjunction with other medications, for example opioids, the effects (and therefore the risks) are magnified by up to a factor of 8.

**DEFINITIONS:**

Benzodiazepine: a class of drugs which are sedating. Can be used in short courses to treat anxiety, seizures, insomnia, alcohol withdrawal and muscle spasms. Examples: diazepam, clonazepam, lorazepam, temazepam, chlordiazepoxide.

‘Z’-Drugs: A class of drugs which are commonly used as sleep aids. Examples: zopiclone, zolpidem.

Our practice policy will be to use these medications only when they are strictly necessary and in the shortest possible courses at the lowest possible doses.

**NEW PATIENTS:**

* Non-pharmacological measures should be advised and tried first.
* Refer patients to the NHS Choices information on insomnia. <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Insomnia/Pages/Prevention.aspx>
* Refer patients to the Royal College of Psychiatrists sleeping well leaflet [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/sleepingwell.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/sleepingwell.aspx)
* Other possible causes of sleep disturbance will be recorded (e.g. pain, dyspnoea, depression) and treated appropriately.
* If a prescription is deemed appropriate, it will be added to acute medication records (not repeat medication records).
* The risks of chronic usage will be explained to the patient.
* GPs will prescribe no more than 14 days (preferably 7 days) supply for new patients.
* A second prescription will not be issued without a follow-up visit to the GP.

**CURRENT LONG-TERM PRESCRIPTIONS:**

If you have a current long term prescription of any of these medications, it is highly likely that you are addicted to them. We recognise that this means it can be very difficult to come off them and we are here to support you with this. For your safety we have decided to make the following rules for these prescriptions:

* Patients will be reviewed annually and informed of the risks of chronic hypnotic use and offered support to gradually reduce their usage. This will be documented in the notes.
* Patients who are unable or unwilling to reduce drug dosage via a managed withdrawal scheme (or who use more than one drug of abuse, or who are dependent on alcohol) may be referred to the substance misuse service in their area.
* Prescriptions for hypnotics and anxiolytics should not be routinely available on repeat prescriptions. However the practice accepts that there may be a small minority of people who need to be on a small maintenance dose of a benzodiazepine. Examples are people:
  + With severe mental health problems under care of a psychiatrist;
  + On benzodiazepines for treatment of epilepsy;
  + Who are seriously ill or terminally ill.
* No more than 28 days supply will be prescribed at a time and early script requests will be declined.
* Repeat dispensing prescriptions will not be issued for hypnotics.
* Lost or stolen prescription, or medication requested early will only be issued in exceptional circumstances.
* Clear dosage directions will be given and will include ‘when required for sleeplessness.’

The practice will undertake a regular review and audit of the prescribing practice of benzodiazepines and Z-drugs to ensure compliance with national and local guidelines.

Here are some websites with further information:

* https://patient.info/mental-health/insomnia-poor-sleep/benzodiazepines-and-z-drugs
* <https://www.talktofrank.com/drug/benzodiazepines>
* <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/sleeping-pills-and-minor-tranquillisers/about-sleeping-pills-and-minor-tranquillisers/>

If you have any questions with regards to this policy, please do not hesitate to book a routine appointment with your GP or our practice pharmacist.

Thanks

Fernlea Surgery