



All-Party Parliamentary Group for Prescribed Drug Dependence

PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 11 May 2016

Politicians and experts meet to explore link between antidepressant prescribing and disability

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Prescribed Drug Dependence is meeting on 11 May at Westminster to discuss evidence of the link between the rise in disability claimants and the rise in antidepressant prescribing. The event is being hosted by Paul Flynn MP, co-chair of the APPG.

Robert Whitaker, the Pulitzer-shortlisted science journalist and author, will present global prescribing and disability data, as well as research which shows how long-term use of antidepressants can lead to worse outcomes for patients: "There is substantial evidence in the scientific literature that antidepressants increase the chronicity of the disorders they are used to treat, and increase the risk that a person will become disabled. The data, I believe, lead to a very disturbing conclusion: the dramatic rise in disability for depression and anxiety seen across the western world is being caused, in large part, by the very drugs which are being used to treat them."

The meeting comes as the Department of Health releases the latest prescribing data, which shows that over 61m prescriptions for antidepressants (costing £285m) were issued in England alone in 2015, a rise of 7% on the previous year and over double the figure in 2005.¹

Dr Joanna Moncrieff, consultant psychiatrist and senior lecturer at University College London, will also discuss the findings of her recent paper on the rise of mental health disability.² Using Department of Work & Pensions data, her paper shows that the number of claimants for mental disorders rose by 103% from 1995 to 1.1 million in 2014, while claimants for other conditions fell by 35% in the same period. Two thirds of mental disorder claimants in 2014 were classified as having a depressive or anxiety disorder.

Moncrieff concludes: "The increasing use of all types of drugs for mental disorders, and especially antidepressants, in England since the 1990s does not appear to have improved the rising trends in disability claims for these conditions. We need to have a serious rethink about current levels of prescribing as it may well be that, for various reasons, the drugs are in fact contributing to the disability burden, resulting in significant social and economic costs."

Following the presentations, Professor Peter Kinderman, president of the British Psychological Society, will chair a panel to debate the findings. Panellists will include Professor Allan Young from the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and Baroness Stroud, executive director of the Centre for Social Justice.

"It is clear that psychiatric drugs can have very significant adverse effects, especially when taken long term," says Kinderman. "And we have seen growing evidence of the effectiveness of evidence-based psychological therapies. We therefore urgently need to drop the 'disease model' of mental health, and embrace a human-centred model, with many more social and psychological interventions and many fewer prescriptions of potentially harmful drugs."

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NOTES TO EDITORS

To attend the event or for further information please contact Luke Montagu at lukemontagu@me.com.

More information on the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Prescribed Drug Dependence can be found at prescribeddrug.org.

¹ Prescription Cost Analysis, England – 2015, HSCIC, <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB20200>

² Viola S, Moncrieff J, Claims for sickness and disability benefits owing to mental disorders in the UK, trends from 1995 to 2104, BJ Psych 2015, <http://bjpo.rcpsych.org/content/2/1/18>