

6 November 2012

To All GPs and Community Pharmacists

Dear Colleague

Misuse and diversion potential of pregabalin (Lyrica®)

The purpose of this letter is to make you aware of the potential for misuse of pregabalin (Lyrica®) which is licensed for the treatment of epilepsy, generalised anxiety disorder and neuropathic pain. This has been brought to our attention by a number of sources who have encountered the problem in Northern Ireland, including addiction teams, GPs, pharmacists and prison treatment services.

The Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC) for Lyrica® (pregabalin) advises that cases of abuse have been reported and caution should be exercised when prescribing to patients with a history of substance abuse¹. A recent review of the literature and adverse drug reaction reporting systems has highlighted case reports of pregabalin dependence across Europe, including the UK. About thirty cases of dependence, abuse or withdrawal symptoms attributed to pregabalin were identified as having been reported to Swedish and French pharmacovigilance centres and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) up until mid-2011. The most frequently reported disorders were withdrawal symptoms, with approximately 50% of the thirty patients being hospitalised for withdrawal. Excessive increases in doses, unauthorised routes of administration and combination with other substances were also reported².

Pregabalin experimenters may often have a history of recreational polydrug misuse. Pregabalin may be sold as a street drug under a

number of pretexts including mood enhancer, to augment the effects of other drugs, to manage opiate withdrawals and cravings or as a substitute for other drugs such as cocaine. Pregabalin misuse may be facilitated by easy online accessibility as well as diversion of legitimately obtained prescriptions³.

Both prescribers and pharmacists should be aware of the potential for misuse of this drug. If a patient demonstrates suspicious behaviour related to pregabalin (e.g. appearing to seek larger than needed doses, losing prescriptions, frequent over-ordering), the possibility of abuse or diversion of medication should be considered. Action should be taken as deemed appropriate to the situation.

If you would like any further information about this, please contact your Medicines Management Adviser.

Yours sincerely



Mr Joe Brogan
Assistant Director of Integrated Care –
Pharmacy & Medicines Management

¹ www.medicines.org.uk/EMC/medicine/14651/SPC/Lyrica+Capsules/

² Gabapentin and Pregabalin: abuse and addiction. Prescrire International June 2012/Volume 21 No 128

³ [Schifano et al. Is there a recreational misuse potential for pregabalin? Analysis of anecdotal online reports in comparison with related gabapentin and clonazepam data. Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics Vol. 80, No. 2, 2011](#)