

Honourable Members of the Committee

I wish to draw the Inquiry's attention to the prescribing of BENZODIAZEPINES for problem sleeping. If there is to be a public education program promoting the need for high quality and sufficient sleep, please may it be accompanied by a health warning NOT to take BENZODIAZEPINES.

BENZODIAZEPINES are for emergency use only, for 14-28 days' use and even within that timeframe require a withdrawal by gradual taper. Addiction and tolerance to the drug can quickly follow if these guidelines are exceeded. The GABA receptors in the brain are stripped of their natural ability to bring about the amazing and vital function of sleep. Long term use has wide ranging detrimental effects on health.

Should a patient learn these truths and wish to withdraw from the drug, increased horrors are likely to follow.

The procedure is harder and considerably longer-up to years- than withdrawing from heroin. It can be a nightmare experience. I refer you to a simple read of Wikipedia- withdrawal from benzodiazepines. Suicidal ideation is not uncommon. Understanding and support for sufferers is exceedingly hard to access. The only government funded Benzodiazepine Withdrawal and Recovery Service, Reconnexion is in Victoria. (I understand Reconnexion will be making a most informed and valuable submission to this Enquiry). What about the rest of Australia? In other words, there are to quote from the RACGP/ Clinical guidelines/Prescribing drugs of dependence in general practice, PartB/Benzodiazepines/2015/1.3.1.4. Increasing awareness of problematic use, including misuse:

'Australia is likely to have a large, but relatively hidden population who unintentionally misuse benzodiazepines and who have developed an iatrogenic dependence...'

I would suggest the patients don't 'misuse', they are being abused by the benzodiazepine.

And if a large group has been identified, what is being done for that group? Those sufferers? And in reference to this Enquiry, a cohort of people who can no longer sleep well and naturally due to oftentimes, inappropriate prescribing?

I wish to include with this submission the letter I wrote regarding my personal experience to the Mr M Dirienzo CEO

Hunter New England Health NSW in 2017.

In conclusion, I am so grateful that the miracle of sleep is becoming more highly valued. For those it evades, it can be excruciatingly debilitating. May many regain or reclaim the undervalued benefits of sleep due to the Enquiry's initiatives.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Kirby

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