

Vigilance is required when prescribing pregabalin due to the risk of dependence and the potential for illegal diversion and medicinal misuse.<sup>1</sup>

- The relaxant and sedative effects of pregabalin make it desirable for use outside of its three licensed indications.<sup>2</sup> Patients misusing pregabalin describe improved sociability, euphoria, relaxation and a sense of calm.<sup>3</sup> Pregabalin may be used to enhance the euphoric effects of other drugs such as opioids.<sup>2</sup>
- Drug-related death figures compiled by the Health Research Board have shown an increase in deaths where pregabalin was implicated, from 14 in 2013 to 45 in 2017.<sup>4</sup>

**The Irish Medical Council** advise all doctors prescribing pregabalin to follow best practice guidelines and to **only prescribe when absolutely required** (September 2019).

### Licensed Indications

Pregabalin is licensed for three therapeutic indications in adults:

- Treatment of peripheral and central neuropathic pain
- Treatment of generalised anxiety disorder
- Adjunctive therapy in patients with partial seizures with or without secondary generalisation.

The dose range is **150 mg - 600 mg** per day (in either two or three divided doses).<sup>5</sup>

### Counsel Patients Initiating Treatment on:

- The risk of harm with pregabalin including dependence<sup>6</sup>
- The risk of potentially fatal interactions between pregabalin and **alcohol**, and with other central nervous system (CNS) depressants, particularly **opioids**<sup>7</sup>
- The effect on ability to drive or operate machinery safely<sup>5</sup>
- The potential for withdrawal symptoms on discontinuation.<sup>5</sup>

### Appropriate Prescribing

- Undertake a risk/benefit assessment prior to prescribing
- Prescribe for a trial period to ascertain if effective
- Review on a regular basis for ongoing effectiveness.

In pain management, pregabalin is licensed for the treatment of **neuropathic pain only**.



### Interactions with Central Nervous System Depressants

**Pregabalin has adverse effects on the CNS.**

These effects may be additive if pregabalin is taken with other CNS depressants e.g. antidepressants, antipsychotics, anxiolytics, hypnotics and opioid analgesics.<sup>6</sup>

- Respiratory failure and coma have been reported in patients taking pregabalin and other CNS depressants.<sup>5</sup>

### Potential for Misuse, Abuse or Dependence

- Exercise caution if prescribing pregabalin for patients with a history of substance abuse. **Monitor patients for symptoms of misuse, abuse or dependence**.<sup>5</sup>

### Diversion

- Consider the 'street value' of pregabalin and monitor for signs of diversion e.g. requests for increased doses and quantities, early prescriptions or replacement of 'lost' prescriptions.

### Withdrawal Symptoms

- Can occur following discontinuation of short-term and long-term use.
- Symptoms include anxiety, convulsions, depression, diarrhoea, dizziness, flu syndrome, headache, hyperhidrosis, insomnia, nausea, nervousness and pain.<sup>5</sup>

### Side-effects

**Very common side-effects are:**

Dizziness	Somnolence	Headache
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**Common side-effects include:**<sup>5</sup>

Confusion	Memory impairment	Sedation	Blurred vision
Vertigo	Erectile dysfunction	Oedema	Muscle cramp
Fatigue	Weight increase	Vomiting	Dry mouth
Amnesia	Increased appetite	Constipation	Nasopharyngitis
Diplopia	Flatulence	Arthralgia	Insomnia

### Tapering Dose

Public Health England (2014) suggest a gradual dose taper:

**Reduce the dose weekly by a maximum of 50 – 100 mg.**<sup>6</sup>

**Specialist advice** may be required to manage patients dependent on pregabalin.

- Refer to [www.drugs.ie](http://www.drugs.ie) to access local services provided by the Addiction Services or Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces.



### Renal Impairment

**Dosage reduction is required in patients with impaired renal function.**

Dosage reduction must be individualised based on creatinine clearance (see SmPC).<sup>5</sup>

**References:** 1. Early Warning and Emerging Trends Subcommittee of the National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol (June 2016). Clinical Advisory 2. Pregabalin Fact Sheet. Accessed at [www.drugs.ie/pregabalin](http://www.drugs.ie/pregabalin) on 12/12/2019 3. Pregabalin Information. Accessed at [www.drugs.ie/pregabalin](http://www.drugs.ie/pregabalin) on 12/12/2019 4. Health Research Board (2019). National Drug-Related Deaths Index 2008 to 2017 Data. Accessed at [www.hrb.ie/publications](http://www.hrb.ie/publications) on 12/12/2019 5. SmPC Lyrica® hard capsules. May 2019. Accessed at [www.medicines.ie](http://www.medicines.ie) on 12/12/2019 6. Public Health England (2014). Advice for prescribers on the risk of the misuse of pregabalin and gabapentin 7. British National Formulary. October 2019.

**Abbreviations:** CNS: Central Nervous System; SmPC: Summary of Product Characteristics

**Medicines Management Programme**  
Version 1 January 2020