



29th September 2023

Róisín Shortall, TD
Dáil Eireann
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Dublin 2.

PQ40177/23

To ask the Minister for Health his views on the number of pregabalin-related deaths between 2012 and 2020, as reported by the Health Research Board (details supplied); the actions he intends to take to address the substantial rise in pregabalin-related deaths; if he intends to curtail the source of pregabalin; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Shortall,

The Health Service Executive have been requested to reply directly to your above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position:

The HSE is aware of the ongoing issue of pregabalin-related poisoning deaths, as reported by the HRB in the National Drug-Related Deaths Index and highlighted in the table below.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Pregabalin	<5	<5	14	27	50	67	48	69	60	84

We note that, in 2020, there were 84 deaths where pregabalin was implicated. This trend has been developing over a number of years and a number of initiatives have been implemented in an effort to address this:

From a HSE perspective, Drugs.ie developed a pregabalin harm reduction campaign in conjunction with the Ana Liffey Drug Project in 2017 that was targeted at services and agencies involved in the provision of drug treatment. This has been updated and reissued on a number of occasions to agencies. The campaign includes a factsheet and a poster which can be downloaded by services. The HSE Medicines Management Programme have developed an information sheet for all doctors in relation to the appropriate prescribing of pregabalin (available [here](#)). A number of sections within the HSE including Addiction Services, Primary Care and the PCRS are sitting on a Working Group chaired by the Irish Medical Council to examine the impact of the overprescribing of benzodiazepines,



Z-drugs, and pregabalin in Ireland. The Group is finalizing the report, which will have specific recommendations for Government, and indeed prescribers, around these drugs.

In addition, there was a circular issued by the Department of Health in 2016 to all prescribers around the issue of pregabalin misuse and a warning in relation to pregabalin regarding drug dependence and withdrawal symptoms issued by the HPRA Drug Safety Newsletter in August 2022. This newsletter issued to all prescribers and highlighted the following areas:

- Pregabalin can cause drug dependence, which may occur at therapeutic doses.
- Patients with a history of substance abuse may be at a higher risk of pregabalin misuse, abuse and dependence.
- Patients prescribed pregabalin should be monitored for symptoms of misuse, abuse and dependence.
- The occurrence of withdrawal symptoms following discontinuation of pregabalin may indicate dependence.
- Patients prescribed pregabalin should be informed of this risk prior to commencing treatment.
- If pregabalin is to be discontinued, it is recommended this should be done gradually, over a minimum of one week, independent of the indication.

In relation to curtailing the source of pregabalin, this would be an issue for either the Medicines, Controlled Drugs and Pharmacy Regulation section of the Department of Health or An Garda Síochána.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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