

## Policy for Prescribing of Benzodiazepines and “Z” Drugs – Initiation and Reduction

### Purpose

To ensure the appropriate prescribing and review of benzodiazepines and “Z” drugs (zopiclone, zolpidem and zaleplon) in line with national and local guidelines.

### Scope

All patients taking a benzodiazepine or “Z” drug.

### Procedure – Initiation

Clinicians in this Practice will prescribe hypnotics and anxiolytics (benzodiazepines and “Z” drugs) in line with national and locally developed guidelines:

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the patient's condition and medical history before initiating benzodiazepine therapy
- Consider non-pharmacological treatments and alternative medications where appropriate
- Where benzodiazepine or “Z” drug treatment is indicated, first line options should be:
  - anxiolytic: diazepam 2mg
  - hypnotic: zopiclone 3.75mg
- For patients who have not received these drugs regularly, Clinicians will only prescribe hypnotics and anxiolytics for a maximum of seven days and at the lowest effective dose. They will only be prescribed if the Clinician feels that the condition is severe, disabling and subjecting the patient to extreme distress and/or for those where other interventions have not been successful. The following guidance published by NICE will apply:
  - the indication for starting a hypnotic or anxiolytic will be documented;
  - all patients will receive advice on non-drug therapies for anxiety and insomnia - can use Accurx resources where appropriate;
  - patients will be advised on the potential risks and benefits of benzodiazepine therapy, including potential side effects and signs of dependence;
  - provide guidance on safe use, storage, and disposal of benzodiazepines;
  - a repeat prescription will not be issued;
  - benzodiazepines or “Z” drugs should not be taken for more than 2-4 weeks (including tapering off).

### Procedure - Reduction

- Patients who are already on a regular benzodiazepine or “Z” drug prescription will be assessed and, if appropriate, counselled for a withdrawal scheme with the aim to gradually reduce drug dosage to zero
- Patients who are unable or unwilling to reduce drug dosage via a managed withdrawal scheme (or who use more than one drug of abuse, or who are

# Longtown Medical Practice

dependent on alcohol) will be referred to the substance misuse service in their area

- Prescriptions for hypnotics and anxiolytics should not be routinely available on repeat. However the practice accepts that there may be a small minority of people who need to be on a small maintenance dose of a benzodiazepine, such as:
  - those with severe mental health problems under care of a psychiatrist;
  - those taking these drugs for treatment of epilepsy;
  - those taking these drugs on the advice of a neurological/musculoskeletal consultant;
  - those who are seriously or terminally ill.
- Lost prescriptions will not be replaced
- If a patient takes higher doses than prescribed, and runs out of medication before the next prescription is due, they will not be prescribed additional medicine
- Prescriptions will not be issued earlier than it is due
- The practice will undertake a regular review and audit of the prescribing practice of benzodiazepines and “Z” drugs to ensure compliance with national and local guidelines.
- Temporary residents should note that:
  - patients not currently on an anxiolytic or hypnotic will be treated according to NICE guidelines and the practice policy;
  - regular users will not receive prescriptions without proof of dosage, frequency and date of last prescription; (this can be obtained from the patient’s surgery);
  - if they remain with the practice for more than two weeks, they should enter the reducing scheme and the policy should be followed as for a registered patient.
- Any new patients currently on hypnotics or anxiolytics will be informed that they will be placed on a withdrawal regime (unless they fall into the exclusion criteria above) when they register with the practice.

## Holidays

- For holidays in the UK a post-dated prescription can be written for the patient to take with them and have dispensed at a local pharmacy
- Prescriptions for holidays abroad will be considered after a copy of the flight booking is provided. No more than 28 days’ supply will be given.

## Responsibility

All members of staff involved with prescriptions.

## Audit

A regular search will be done to ensure all patients’ prescriptions follow this procedure.

## Review date:

January 2027

## Appendix 1

### Guidance

Local NENC formulary, for anxiety medication pathway for adults:

[Anxiety-Medication-Pathway-for-Adults.docx](#)

Hypnotics – NICE guidance:

- NICE Z-drugs: [Z-drugs | Prescribing information | Insomnia | CKS | NICE](#)
- NICE hypnotics and Anxiolytics: [Hypnotics and anxiolytics | Treatment summaries | BNF | NICE](#)