

## SAMH'S VIEW:

# MEDICINES USED FOR MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

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### ABOUT THE SAMH'S VIEW SERIES

#### *SAMH's View*

statements set out SAMH's position on a particular policy topic. They are produced by the Public Affairs team.

## Context

There are five main categories of medication used for mental ill-health in Scotland. These are hypnotics and anxiolytics (for insomnia and anxiety respectively), antipsychotics, antidepressants, drugs used for ADHD, and drugs for dementia.<sup>1</sup>

## Key points

- SAMH's [What's the Script?](#) report summarises the experiences of 271 people who had been prescribed medicine for mental ill-health.<sup>2</sup>
- Medication can be very important in facilitating recovery.<sup>3</sup>
- Official guidance says people should be actively involved in prescribing decisions.<sup>4</sup>
- 28% of What's the Script? respondents had no discussion on their medicine.
- Official guidance says most people with mild to moderate depression should initially be offered therapy, self-help or physical activity instead of antidepressants.<sup>5,6</sup>
- Around half of GPs are not familiar, or not sure if they are familiar with the guidance mentioned above.<sup>7</sup>
- The side-effects of medicines for mental ill-health can be severe and distressing.<sup>8</sup>
- The most common side effects in What's the Script? were fatigue and weight gain.<sup>9</sup>
- Almost one in ten respondents who raised concerns on side effects felt un-heard.<sup>10</sup>
- Prescribing for most mental ill-health medications has increased over the past decade, both in Scotland and elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> This is not always reported responsibly.
- The increase in antidepressants reflects longer, more effective treatment at higher dosages<sup>12</sup> and multiple drug uses: eg they are also prescribed for pain and incontinence.<sup>13</sup>
- Guidance suggests prescribing for at least 6 months after remission: 2 years if there is risk of relapse.<sup>14</sup>
- The majority of people dying by suicide were prescribed a mental health drug in the preceding year.<sup>15</sup>

## SAMH calls for:

- Prescribers to follow guidance on involving people in prescribing choices.
- Prescribers to follow guidance for initial treatment of mild to moderate depression.
- Prescription reviews at least every 2-4 weeks for 3 months,<sup>16</sup> at 6 months after remission<sup>17</sup> then regularly (at least annually) as appropriate and desired.
- Politicians/media to avoid stigmatising people who use mental ill-health medicines.
- People to receive clear information about their medication and any side effects.
- Side-effects to be taken seriously and alternative treatments tried wherever possible.
- The [Yellow Card](#) scheme for reporting serious side-effects to be promoted widely.
- Pharmacists to explore appropriate and sensitive ways of offering suicide prevention information to people when they collect mental ill-health medication.

## Further detail:

### PRESCRIBING STATISTICS

- [ISD Scotland](#) (statistics updated annually)

### MEDICATION INFORMATION AND PRESCRIBING GUIDANCE

- [British National Formulary](#)
- [Healthcare Improvement Scotland Care Pathways for mental health](#)
- [NICE Guidance on Managing Depression](#)
- [NICE guidance on assessing and managing bipolar disorder](#)
- [NICE advice on hypnotics](#)
- [SAMH Understanding mental health problems](#)
- [SIGN guidance on non-pharmaceutical management of depression](#)
- [Antidepressant Decision Aid: What You Should Know](#)

## Notes

- 1 ISD Scotland, [Medicines used for Mental Health](#), October 2016
- 2 SAMH [What's the Script?](#) 2012
- 3 SAMH [What's the Script?](#) 2012
- 4 General Medical Council, [Good Practice in Prescribing and Managing Medicines and Devices](#), 2013
- 5 NICE, [Depression in Adults: the treatment and management of depression in adults](#), 2009
- 6 [SIGN, guidance on non-pharmaceutical management of depression, 2010](#)
- 7 SAMH, [A SAMH Survey of General Practitioners in Scotland](#), March 2014
- 8 Rethink, [Medication and Side Effects](#), accessed August 2016
- 9 SAMH [What's the Script?](#) 2012
- 10 SAMH [What's the Script?](#) 2012
- 11 Scottish Government [Key Information on the use of Antidepressants in Scotland](#) July 2014
- 12 Scottish Government [Key Information on the use of Antidepressants in Scotland](#) July 2014
- 13 Royal College of Psychiatrists, [Briefing Paper on Antidepressant use in Scotland](#)
- 14 NICE, [Depression in Adults: recognition and management](#), 2016
- 15 NHS Scotland, [A profile of deaths by suicide in Scotland 2009-14](#), 2016
- 16 NICE, [Depression in Adults. Quality Standard 8, Quality Statement 11](#), 2011
- 17 NICE, [Depression in Adults: recognition and management](#), 2016