

A Case of Addiction by Prescription

Bliss Johns was prescribed clonazepam (Rivotril/Klonopin) for a facial tic. She had no history of anxiety, insomnia, depression or any other psychological issue, took no other drugs, drank very little alcohol and had never smoked. Apart from the tic, she was fit and well.

No mention was made of the addictive properties of her medication or that it was used as a tranquilliser, and the internet at that time was not the hub of information that it is today. She had no clue that she was about to become an addict.

Although it worked initially, the drug soon lost its efficacy. She gradually became more and more unwell due to tolerance withdrawal and other drug effects. Attempts to quit resulted in more withdrawal symptoms. Because of this, she ended up taking the clonazepam for almost eight years by repeat prescription.

With her memory and other cognitive abilities becoming more and more impaired, Bliss gave up her psychotherapy training and work as a counsellor to do a less demanding job. It was soon after, while searching for answers, that she found Professor Heather Ashton's withdrawal protocol and eventually successfully tapered off.

She endured a very intense and problematic withdrawal with numerous physical and psychological symptoms but used her knowledge of coping tools to manage well. When her symptoms began improving she began started an online blog and soon discovered that tens of thousands globally are facing a similar predicament. This evolved into a support website and is now the *Recovery Road Wellness Project*, a registered charity which supports thousands of users in withdrawal.

What has been most remarkable about the *Benzo-Wise: A Recovery Companion* author's experience is that without having had pre-existing anxiety, she endured the most harrowing anxiety-related symptoms, all of which surfaced during her taper and disappeared with her recovery.

This confirms the following statement made by Professor Malcolm Lader, Professor of Clinical Psychopharmacology at the Institute of Psychiatry, University of London, during a BBC Radio 4 interview:

"It is more difficult to withdraw people from benzodiazepines than it is from heroin. It just seems that the dependency is so ingrained and the withdrawal symptoms you get are so intolerable that people have a great deal of problem coming off. The other aspect is that with heroin, usually the withdrawal is over within a week or so. With benzodiazepines, a proportion of patients go on to long term withdrawal and they have very unpleasant symptoms for month after month, and I get letters from people saying you can go on for two years or more. Some of the tranquilliser groups can document people who still have symptoms ten years after stopping."

"We knew from the start that patients taking markedly increased doses could get dependent, but thought only addictive personalities could become dependent and that true addiction was unusual. We got that wrong. What we didn't know, but know now, is that even people taking therapeutic doses can become dependent."

Not everyone is subject to a nightmare withdrawal from benzodiazepines, but those who do suffer are often left reeling. Too many are misdiagnosed and are given inappropriate treatment due to a general lack of awareness about withdrawal. The author has shared her experience, coping tips and insights with the hope that readers will be informed, reassured and encouraged.

The *Benzo-Wise* book has been widely successful, especially in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It has won two literary awards and is proving to be beneficial not only for benzodiazepine users, but also for those in antidepressant and other forms of withdrawal. Doctors, counsellors, rehabilitation staff and relatives are also finding it to be useful.

Benzo-Wise: A Recovery Companion is available internationally at Amazon and from other book retailers. The publisher, Campanile Publishing offers discounts on orders of 10 or more copies. ISBN 9780982375921