

To: Australian Government Productivity Commission

New Inquiry Mental Health

From Kathy Brown

Administration community volunteer for Australian Antidepressants Awareness facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianAntidepressantClassAction>

Areas:

Issues relating to carers, family and friends

Suicide and suicide prevention

Health and medical services

A brief history of my community advocacy role.

The community facebook page was created in 2016 in support of the first proposed antidepressant class action in Australia, this proposed class action was based on a pharmaceutical antidepressant clinical trial known as Study 329 for the antidepressant Paroxetine (known as Aropax in Australia) Study 329 was funded by [SmithKline Beecham](#) known since 2000 as GSK [GlaxoSmithKline](#)

In Study 329 approximately 12 out of 90 children attempted suicide, this information was hidden from the public, the documentary series Panorama reported on this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hENtdYoG0Fg>

Many Australians have continued to reach out to the community page for justice, class actions and support, these people have either lost loved ones by suicide after being prescribed antidepressants or have been directly or indirectly harmed by antidepressants, many people feel as though they have little or no support at all.

I have lost count of the many people who have messaged me, some days I would start my day with tears in my eyes after receiving messages from another parent who had lost their child to suicide after being prescribed antidepressants or had a medication dose change and they or someone they knew was suffering terribly.

- Any loss of a loved one is heartbreaking, but these deaths and harm could be prevented.

I strongly believe the government is responsible for mental health issues and the suicide rate rising, It was our government that started the "Time Efficient Mental Health" program in the early 2000's.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/mental-health-takes-industry-pills-20060808-ge2vju.html?fbclid=IwAR1ZxsPV010sKcTDsvYkadtIzM4vUHMIF9TqKkX7wrgk3O8u68NOAuqniig>

As an example, after seeing a G.P who had been to a Wyeth government funded seminar as part of the "Time Efficient Mental Health" program, we asked if there were any side effects from the antidepressant Effexor a Wyeth antidepressant, and was told by the Doctor that they could be eaten like lollies, 6 years of hell began.

Many people who were prescribed antidepressants from this program, are still unable to safely taper off their antidepressants and most people don't seem to be encouraged to taper from these pills and when they try, they are tapered too fast which can cause great harm or even death.

- There isn't enough awareness of the dangers or ongoing support on tapering.

When some of these people do try to taper from the pills, they are told they are relapsing but in fact could just be going through horrendous withdrawals, this is normally never looked into further, the pills are reinstated and the cycle continues.

Unless you have witnessed the harm these pills can cause and the adverse effects, even after 30 minutes of a missed dose, I believe many health professionals don't know just how dangerous these medications can be.

All medical professionals should be fully trained in safe tapering, the bead method and dangerous adverse effects such as akathisia, serotonin syndrome, electric brain zaps, attempted suicide and suicide caused from antidepressants.

Every medical clinic and hospital should have staff who can specialise in helping patients and their carers to taper, such as safe tapering programs, single car accident deaths and all suicides should be fully investigated to see if these medications were involved or if there was a dose change.

The bead method is when people taper down the medications to get off them with hopefully a reduction in the adverse effects so that they can still function, this involves opening the capsule and taking out granule by granule over a few months, sometimes taking years to complete.

If the antidepressant is in a tablet form, the pills have to be cut finely with a pill cutter or shaved off with a knife so people's adverse effects are tolerable, many people can't work throughout this period, some people can also become suicidal during this period and need lots of support.

Antidepressants can be dangerous on starting, stopping and changing the dose, as an example after six days of being prescribed Paroxetine (Paxil) Stewart Dolin jumped in front of a train, his suicide was proven to be caused from the adverse effect akathisia from the medication. Dolin vs GSK

- These medications can be dangerous to everyone, no age group is safer than another, this misinformation is also putting lives at risk.

The community feedback from the facebook page helped to achieve two TGA medication safety updates about antidepressants, as a reminder for doctors and medical professionals to tell their patients and their carers about the risks of all antidepressants and the suicide risk.

Here are the two safety updates.

<https://www.tga.gov.au/publication-issue/medicines-safety-update-volume-7-number-5-october-december2016#a2>

<https://www.tga.gov.au/publication-issue/medicines-safety-update-volume-9-number-2-june-2018#a2>

In my opinion I don't believe the public is still fully aware of the dangers, there are many flaws in the warning system regarding these medications, most boxes of medications now don't have the product information in them, so if the Doctor or Pharmacist doesn't let the patient or their carer know about the risks, they don't know putting lives at risk.

I still don't understand why Prozac is the safest choice for children when at an FDA hearing in 1991, there were many reasons not to give anyone this antidepressant, why are these medications being sold in Australia? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Om2J9g-ssKo>

I have contacted the Therapeutic Goods Administration on many occasions about trying to achieve clear warnings on the boxes of all antidepressants similar to cigarette packets, then there wouldn't be any second guessing, this would be a simple direct solution.

This alone could save great harm and lives.

I have attached an example of clear warnings on boxes of antidepressants and also a draft of what I believe are some of the flaws in the warning system. Every department seems to pass the buck this again continues to put lives at risk, it is our government's responsibility to protect the public and this isn't happening.

The Australian government needs to take action and put some funding towards more awareness and the dangers of these commonly prescribed medications and the after care of people trying to come off them.

Thousands and thousands of people are struggling to come off these medications and they need lots of support, this isn't happening and is causing suicides, attempted suicides, marriage breakdowns, violence the list goes on.

If the Australian government is serious about reducing the suicide rate and helping people with medication related mental health issues and other harm, they would urgently address this.

There really needs to be a more holistic supportive approach to treating people with any mental illness and not just giving people dangerous medications without enough warnings to them or their carers. Many antidepressants and psych medications can gimmick a mental illness, such as anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, this also needs to be ruled out.

- Is the illness caused from the medication prescribed?
- When there are many suicides in certain areas, was the same clinic or Doctors prescribing antidepressants and if so what medication was it ?

This all needs to be investigated and a total overhaul of the warnings system.

I also must mention the on-going costs of antidepressants for people who simply can't afford them, or don't have a health care card and have to pay full price, it is dangerous for people just to stop them suddenly. There needs to be financial support and help if a compound pharmacist is needed to make tapered doses to help people safely taper from them.

How many people have been driven to suicide or violence because they think they are going crazy from the adverse effects of these pills, I can only imagine what terror some of these people must feel, that suicide becomes a better choice.

This is a very complex matter but needs the utmost attention.

Very concerned

Kathy Brown

<https://www.facebook.com/AustralianAntidepressantClassAction>



Medication induced suicide & violence prevention

Getting the message across to the public

TGA

- TGA) Australia's medication regulator, monitors the safety of medications and medical devices in Australia.
- Antidepressants, psychiatric, smoking cessation, asthma medications have been linked to suicide, attempted suicide, violence and other adverse effects including serious withdrawals.
- The TGA to mandate clear warnings on all dangerous medications with all pharmaceutical companies and police the advertising of antidepressants as treatment. Making sure the risks and dangers of all dangerous medications are clear and concise for the public safety.
- Policing all Doctors that prescribe any dangerous medications, and making sure they are definitely telling their patients about the risks.
- Follow up on serious medication alerts and information to make sure the public's safety is top priority.
- The government to set up safe slow tapering programs (knowledge of the bead method)
- Some antidepressants and opiates are extremely difficult to stop taking and more awareness is needed.
- Database of violence, suicides, single car accidents and a record of all medications the living and deceased person were taking at the time.
- New medication warning pamphlets made for Doctors to give to their patients/carers, when their patients are first prescribed any dangerous medications.

ALL
PHARMA
COMPANIES

- All pharmaceutical companies must have clear warnings printed on the outside of the boxes of all dangerous medications, similar to cigarette packets and clear warnings inside the boxes.
- Currently many dangerous medications do not have the product information in the boxes anymore, and if patients and their carers are not told the risks by their Doctor or Pharmacist, they do not know the dangers putting lives at risk.
- Cigarettes have a clear warning and they can't kill you by suicide, akathisia or serotonin syndrome

AHPRA
ALL
DOCTORS &
HEALTH CARE
WORKERS

- AHPRA - Regulating Australia's health practitioners in partnership with the National Boards
- All Doctors and health care workers must tell their patients/carers about the dangers of medications and the potential suicide risk and adverse effects, new warning pamphlets made to hand to patients.
- There have been two medication safety updates issued by the TGA in Dec. 2016 and June 2018 as a reminder for Doctors to tell their patients/carers, about the dangers of antidepressants. Community feedback says that Doctors are still not telling their patients about the risks.
- TGA alerts. <https://www.tga.gov.au/publication-issue/medicines-safety-update-volume-7-number-5-october-december-2016>
- <https://www.tga.gov.au/publication-issue/medicines-safety-update-volume-9-number-2-june-2018#a2>
- Doctors and every health care worker, clinics, hospitals to be fully trained in the safe tapering and withdrawals of antidepressants and other dangerous medications, to reduce adverse effects and suicides, so people can function.
- Currently Doctors and NPS Medicinewise are advising to taper to fast, causing adverse effects and possible suicides and violence, there is not enough support for people trying to come off antidepressants.
- Doctors to monitor for adverse effects such as akathisia and the mimicking of depression/suicidal thoughts caused by the medication the patient is taking. **Clearly define, is it the illness or the medication causing harm**
- More awareness about akathisia, serotonin syndrome.
- Some antidepressants have to be tapered no more than 5 or 10% reduction every 4-8 weeks to help reduce adverse effects. This can be debilitating for some people, being unable to work or function at all.

PHARMACISTS

- All Pharmacists have an up to date database of medications that should not be co-committed to avoid serotonin syndrome and other adverse effects.
- Cross check that patient and partner/carer knows about the risks, If the patient doesn't have information about the adverse effects, make sure the information is handed over and told to read.
- Flashing warning comes up on computer, if two medications that can cause harm are being taken together.

MENTAL
HEALTH
FRONTS

- All mental health fronts such as Beyond Blue, Headspace, Sane, Black dog institute, etc. that advertise and mention antidepressants as a treatment, must make sure there are clear and concise warnings on websites and pamphlets/materials that stand out. **Update all information.**
- Currently the information is misleading and hard to find on some websites and or the risks not even mentioned.
- As an example misleading wording on a Headspace and Beyond Blue pamphlet that says "No deaths have been reported that are attributable to SSRI prescription" **This is a false statement.**

YOU, YOUR
FRIENDS AND
FAMILY

- The public are still not being told about the dangers of antidepressants and other dangerous medications such as common medications Champix and Singulair.
- The public is also very unaware of Black box warning medications. Antidepressants carry a black box warning in the USA (boxed warning in Australia) this is the highest warning classification and means the medication can be life threatening.
- All medications carry risks and benefits, but if suicide, violence and severe withdrawals are side effects, everyone should know about the dangers. **Our government should make this top priority to help reduce the suicide rate and further harm**