**Diazepam Prescribing**

**Sedatives for procedures being carried out elsewhere**

We are unable to provide prescriptions for sedatives, like diazepam, for dental and medical procedures and scans taking place in other healthcare settings.

The national prescribing guidelines followed by GPs (the British National Formulary – BNF) states that all benzodiazepines are ‘contraindicated’ (not allowed) in treatment of phobias (fear conditions, such as fear of flying). It also states that the use of benzodiazepines to treat short-term anxiety is ‘inappropriate’. Benzodiazepines are only licensed for short-term use in a generalised anxiety crisis – but if this is the case for you, you should seek proper care and

support for your mental health, and it would not be advisable to go on a flight. Your GP would be taking a significant legal risk by prescribing against these national guidelines.

Benzodiazepines, like diazepam, work by making you feel more relaxed and sleepier which can feel like a good thing when facing an anxiety cause procedure. However, they do come with associated risks, especially if the person performing the procedure does not know what you have taken. In some cases, they can have the opposite effect causing increased agitation. They can also impair your judgement and lead to drowsiness and light headedness and increase your risk of accidents. Longer term they can lead to issues with dependence (addiction) and tolerance.

When procedures are taking place in other settings it is important for the team performing these to know if you are taking sedative medication and to be able to monitor their effects. It is generally therefore best that the person who is undertaking the procedure is the one prescribing the medication. Dentists are prescribers and can prescribe sedatives if they decide it is necessary. Likewise for scans and procedures organised by the hospital if you think you may need a sedative you should speak to the requesting or performing team who can decide if this is appropriate or not.

If a dentist wishes to prescribe sedating medications for anxious patients that dentist should be responsible for issuing the prescription. The dental practitioner’s formulary, which is the list of drugs a dentist can prescribe is found on the BNF dental practitioners formulary, includes Diazepam Tablets and Oral Solution. Dentists are expected to provide NHS prescriptions for their NHS Patients and Private prescriptions for their private patients if they deem it to be clinically appropriate to do so.

The Intercollegiate Advisory Committee for Sedation in Dentistry has guidelines (<https://www.saad.org.uk/IACSD%202020.pdf>) which states “The monitoring and discharge requirements for oral sedation are the same as for intravenous sedation. Oral sedation must only be administered in the place where the dental treatment is provided and must only be carried out by practitioners who are already competent in intravenous sedation.”

**Diazepam and flying**

New Barn Close Surgery has taken the decision to no longer prescribe benzodiazepines, like diazepam, for fear of flying. We understand this may be difficult, particularly for those who have in the past received prescriptions from us, but we have set out some of the reasons behind this decision below.

1.Benzodiazepines are sedative drugs; part of the way they work is by making you feel sleepier and more relaxed. Whilst flying there are concerns this could affect behaviour and response times in an emergency, potentially putting yourself, fellow passengers, and crew members at increased risk if they needed to help you instead of dealing with the situation.

Diazepam is a sedative, so it makes you sleepier. If an emergency occurred during the flight, this could impair your ability to concentrate, follow instructions, or react to the situation. This could seriously affect the safety of you and the people around you. Such incidents are rare but they do occur, and it can be fatal if you are unable to evacuate the plane properly (an example event is flight BA28M, where 55 people sadly died while the plane burned while sat on Manchester Airport runway, and the official AAIB incident report specifically commented on evacuation delays contributing to the deaths). No-one else on board a plane will evacuate for you – the cabin crew are there to guide an evacuation, but you need to be responsible for yourself. As a result, many airlines consider sedative medications as a reason why someone would not be allowed on a plane, in a similar way that someone who has consumed excessive alcohol may be removed from a plane.

2. Benzodiazepines may increase your risk of deep vein thrombosis, blood clots in the legs and lungs. They affect sleep quality, leading to more non-REM sleep, meaning your body moves less than during natural sleep. This risk is more likely on flights longer than four hours. Clots like this can make people extremely ill and can at times be fatal.

3. Although for most people benzodiazepines cause sedation, they can occasionally cause people to become more agitated and behave in unusual ways. This may lead to problems whilst in airports and on flights.

4. Respiratory changes. Oxygen levels even for normal healthy people reduce when up in the air. Benzodiazepines can affect your breathing causing you to breathe less well which might be particularly problematic if you have underlying heart or breathing difficulties already.

5. These effects can all be enhanced when taking alcohol which is common on flights and could add to the concerns already discussed above.

6. Benzodiazepines are not licensed medications for phobias. This means that GPs could be liable for any adverse effects taken when these are prescribed for this reason. They are not recommended for mild and self-limiting anxiety. They can be

used for moderate to severe general anxiety, along with other measures, but in these cases, patients would be unwell and would not be going on flights. Fear of flying is not a generalised anxiety disorder.

7. Benzodiazepines are illegal in some countries and so you could find yourselves in trouble with the authorities in these places.

8. Driving. Benzodiazepines can take a variable amount of time to get out of your system. Sedative effects can potentially impair driving and increase risk of accidents particularly in people who are new to taking the medication. It may be hard to know when you are safe to drive again particularly as above if combined with alcohol. Different countries have different laws regarding driving with drugs, but you can be tested for this at the roadside.

We appreciate that fear of flying is a genuine and distressing condition which can cause considerable distress. Many airlines offer fit to fly courses which can help with managing this and we would encourage you to look at some of the links below Fear of flying course | Fearless Flyer (easyjet.com) Primary course | British Airways™ Fear of flying courses | Flying With Confidence Flying without fear