

Briefing for Services on illicit substances (tablets or capsules) that present as prescribed medication

29th June 2020

Background

There have recently been cases of overdose across Cornwall, including where individuals have died or been hospitalised. These have involved tablets/capsules of differing colours, shapes and sizes, and appearance which are difficult to differentiate from prescription medication.

Purpose

The purpose of this briefing is to:

1. Provide advice and information about the **nature of the tablets and capsules**
2. Highlight the **risks** of these drugs and what action can be taken to mitigate these risks
3. **Provide good practice guidance** in sharing these risks with clients/residents and helping them to stay safe.
4. Identify how to **share intelligence** or concerns you may have around these drugs.

1. Pills and Tablets



1-Red Devils

The tablets and capsules that are causing concern may look like Benzodiazepines such as Diazepam (Valium), Lorazepam, Rohypnol (Flunitrazepam) and Alprazolam (Xanax). Some also look like Pregablin. They often come in blister packs or other packaging which makes them appear **like they are pharmaceutically prepared, but in reality, they are of illicit origin.**

NB – not all pills, tablets and capsules look like the pictures in this briefing. The same name can look completely different or be used for a completely different substance. These are just examples.

Forensic testing of seized tablets shows that some tablets do not contain any of the drug they purport to be instead contain very dangerous chemicals for non-medical use.

Testing has also shown that the drug content of each tablet differs widely despite the tablet markings indicating a specific dose. Some tablets tested have shown many times more active ingredient than the markings suggest. This can make overdose and/or death much more likely. Other Tablets contain no psychoactive ingredients at all.

In Cornwall, recent people affected, who were experienced users of Diazepam consumed tablets that matched Diazepam in colour, size, markings and quality of production. The effects of the tablets made these people so unwell that two people were immobilised for 48 -72 hours and two others ended up in hospital. These tablets could therefore also make people vulnerable to predatory behaviour from others.

Benzodiazepine drugs that are not prescribed (i.e. bought online or through illicit routes) are especially dangerous and even more so if combined with alcohol and/ or other drugs.



2-Blues

Advice

- Please ensure your staff and residents/clients are aware of these pills/capsules in circulation and the serious risks that they pose.
- Please ensure updated Alerts from the DAAT are shared widely across your networks
- Please submit Early Warning Notices of any additional intel you come across

2. Risks

If anyone overdoses on any of these tablets/capsules, an ambulance and hospitalisation will be required ASAP.



3-Yellows

Benzodiazepine drugs and pain relief medication regularly feature in drug related deaths in Cornwall as do their illicit counterparts.

Benzodiazepine drugs in overdose can show a range of symptoms, very similar to an opiate overdose

and may include;

- Drowsiness
- Low blood pressure
- Shallow breathing

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- Impaired motor function
- Dizziness
- Impaired balance
- Muscle weakness
- Fainting
- Coma

Naloxone will not reverse an overdose of these tablets/capsules. However, some individuals are taking these tablets/capsules, alongside heroin and/or other opioids, in which case naloxone could help to reduce the overall respiratory depression caused by the opioids and the overall impact of the drugs on their system.

Therefore, it is recommended that naloxone is used if you suspect opioids have also been taken or don't know what has been taken, but to also call an ambulance.



Advice

- Call 999 for an ambulance
- Give immediate first aid basic life support (recovery position and monitor the airway, breathing & pulse).
- Administer naloxone to those you believe may have also taken opiates
- Do not assume that the condition of a person who is functioning normally will not deteriorate at a later stage. They will need close supervision closely if they do not go to hospital.
- Complete incident form below (whether naloxone was used or not) and send to the DAAT and WAWY



Appendix 9 -
Incident Reporting :

3. Good practice guidance in sharing this information with your clients/residents

As Providers you know your clients/residents very well and these strong and trusting relationships can be very helpful in ensuring individuals are made aware

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of these risks and understand the advice and important messages of understanding the dangers of these tablets and capsules

Harbour Housing has developed a leaflet for their residents to make this information more accessible to them. They have also spent a lot of time identifying their most at-risk residents and spending time individually, trying to understand the drugs they are taking and why as well as sharing the risks, both verbally and in writing.

The Harbour Housing documents (below) can be used or adapted for your premises

Advice

- Assess which residents may be most at risk. WAWY colleagues may be able to support you with this.
- Speak to individual clients/residents to ensure they understand the risks they are taking.
- Provide additional welfare checks to ensure these residents are safe
- Provide clients/residents with a written leaflet/Drug Alert if possible or put poster up in a visible location to ensure they can go back and review what you have discussed. Sample client information from Harbour can be found below.



Drug Alert 15
June.pdf



Drug alert
questionnaire.pdf

4. Sharing Intelligence

If such tablets have been abandoned, you can contact your local Drugs Liaison Officer to arrange collection and testing.

Any further information about drugs in use and their effects should be sent to the DAAT CIOSdruginformation@cornwall.gov.uk

Anyone aware of any local intelligence related to availability, drugs finds or incidents should use the partnership Police intelligence portal –

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<https://safecornwall.co.uk/preventing-crime/partner-agency-information-sharing/>

NB: Due to the fluidity of this situation we will issue further guidance if the guidance changes with regards to pharmacies.

Similarly, if you have proposed amendments that would assist you further, please do not hesitate to contact us, and we will update guidance in the light of local needs arising.

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