



BMA annual meeting: Pregabalin must be made a controlled drug, BMA says

Tom Moberly

UK Editor, BMJ

Pregabalin should be reclassified as a controlled drug to tackle widespread problems of misuse and addiction, the BMA has said.

Delegates at the BMA's annual representative meeting in Bournemouth on 28 June voted in favour of a motion saying that the BMA should "lobby the appropriate authorities to make pregabalin a controlled drug."

Pregabalin is currently a prescription only drug and is licensed for the treatment of neuropathic pain and generalised anxiety disorder, and as an adjunctive therapy for epilepsy. The motion called on the BMA to note the "widespread problems of misuse and addiction with pregabalin amongst users of illicit drugs" and "the contribution of pregabalin to bullying and violence in prison populations."

The motion was proposed by Mark Pickering of the BMA's Yorkshire regional council. He said that there were problems with the misuse of the current pregabalin prescribing systems in the community, and that there were "stark" problems in prisons associated with the drug. "Patients will sell it for tobacco," he said. "Inmates who don't want to sell their

pregabalin will be threatened and bullied on a daily basis, including physical violence."

Making pregabalin a controlled drug "would send a message to patients and prescribers that it is a drug with significant problems of misuse, addiction, and diversion," he said. "Making it a controlled drug would reinforce that message in the community where awareness of the problem is growing but is still not where it should be."

Peter Campbell, deputy chair of the BMA's Junior Doctors Committee, spoke against the motion, arguing that making pregabalin a controlled drug would "criminalise its possession, possession with intent to supply, or its supply itself." He said, "Let's vote for evidence based harm reduction based on the reason that our prison populations are struggling and focusing on the reasons for the social and political determinants of health—and not move towards a situation that criminalises more people with substance abuse."

Pickering said he did not intend to criminalise people possessing the drug. "If it's a class C drug, it's not criminal," he said. "We're not talking about criminalising it at all."