

Cyclizine: Abuse potential and availability to purchase from pharmacies

1 Introduction: A prevention of future deaths report was issued in December 2023 following the death of a 35yr old woman from Greater Manchester, due to cyclizine toxicity. She had a history of anorexia and factitious disorder, and regularly misused cyclizine (which she would crush and inject intravenously). She died in hospital a few days after having temporarily left the ward and taken a taxi to purchase cyclizine from a nearby pharmacy [Charlene Roberts: Prevention of future deaths report - Courts and Tribunals Judiciary](#)

2 Cyclizine can be abused and can be addictive: The coroner reported a 'lack of understanding' amongst healthcare professionals around the abuse and addiction potential of cyclizine (which is not routinely tested for in toxicology). This should be considered at the point of prescribing or sale of cyclizine. It is important to be aware that misusers of cyclizine may crush the oral tablets and administer intravenously for its euphoric ("high") or hallucinatory effects.

3 Dangers of cyclizine misuse/signs of toxicity: Acute toxicity from cyclizine arises from peripheral anticholinergic effects, and effects on the central nervous system. Misuse alongside large amounts of alcohol is particularly dangerous since the anti-emetic effect of cyclizine (it prevents vomiting) might increase the toxicity of alcohol. Recreational methadone users are also known to use it to enhance the psychoactive effect.

4 Cyclizine is available to purchase from some community pharmacies (including online pharmacies): The coroner found that many health care professionals did not realise that oral cyclizine is classified as a Pharmacy (P) medicine and licenced for travel sickness. It can be sold from a registered pharmacy premises by or under the supervision of a pharmacist. After the death of their loved one the deceased family went to another pharmacy and were able to purchase without any questions or a pharmacist being available.

5 Cyclizine addiction in those with complex nutritional needs: There are some small-scale publications which highlight case examples of those with complex nutritional requirements becoming addicted to cyclizine. This may be a cohort at risk where awareness among health care professionals needs raising and alternative antiemetics/sickness medications used in preference, where clinically appropriate. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0029665109001621>

6 Review of long-term use: Although in this case treatment with cyclizine was started in hospital it was continued in primary care for 5 years unquestioned until the deceased was diagnosed with cyclizine abuse linked to past trauma. The deceased was rejected from "nearly 20" inpatient eating disorder services, "predominantly" due to her dual diagnosis of substance abuse and an eating disorder. Earlier recognition of dependency and review of cyclizine use may have prevented this.

7 Summary: There is growing evidence of the potential for abuse and addiction to cyclizine particularly in those with complex nutritional needs. Health Care professionals need to be alert to this and the potential for the tablets to be crushed and injected for its euphoric effects. Pharmacists should consider their pharmacy protocols for the sale of high-risk medicines and also determine whether all requests should be referred to the pharmacist for approval. Pharmacists should consider checking the national care record for the patient before making a supply.

References

1. Charlene Roberts: Prevention of future deaths report - Courts and Tribunals Judiciary. December 2023. Available at [Charlene Roberts: Prevention of future deaths report - Courts and Tribunals Judiciary](#) Accessed 1st March 2024.
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