Outpatient Benzodiazepine Tapering In Primary Care

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Objective

• Discuss safe approaches to tapering patients from benzodiazepines in the primary care ambulatory care setting.
Background

- Evidence has shown that long-term use of benzodiazepines has limited benefits and many risks.

- Unfortunately, an increasing amount of patients chronically remain on these agents - often times in combination with other potentially dangerous drugs.

- Inappropriate benzodiazepine tapering, or abrupt discontinuation, can lead to increased risk of serious withdrawal symptoms, including seizures or death.

Organizing the Taper

- Slow taper is recommended
  - Length of taper varies based on length of therapy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of Taper</th>
<th>Change in Dose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 1-2</td>
<td>10%-25% reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 3+</td>
<td>10% reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When 20% of dosage remains</td>
<td>5% reduction</td>
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- If withdrawal symptoms or condition worsens:
  - Consider maintaining current dose for 1-2 weeks longer, then continue
  - Consider continuing taper at a slower rate

*Pharmacist’s Letter. 2014 July; 30(8):300806*
*Current Psychiatry. 2012 April; 11(4):55-64*
### Example Taper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Tapering Schedule</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 and 2</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 and 4</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and 6</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 and 8</td>
<td>½</td>
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</tbody>
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Monitoring

- Screening
  - PHQ-9/GAD-7 and Drug Abuse Screening Tool (DAST) screenings
- Adherence to tapering program
  - Checking state’s prescription drug monitoring programs
- Safe benzodiazepine alternatives
- Patient counseling and education
- Close follow-up appointments scheduled
Key Takeaways

1) **KEY TAKEAWAY #1**
   Slow benzodiazepine tapering is important to prevent harmful adverse events.

2) **KEY TAKEAWAY #2**
   Additional monitoring needs considered in each patient to address underlying conditions and ensure a successful taper.

3) **KEY TAKEAWAY #3**
   Creating a “roadmap” for the patient to take home allows for ease of self-tapering between provider appointments.
Self-Assessment Question

On average, how often should a patient’s weekly benzodiazepine dose be decreased dose during chronic tapering?

a) Every 3-5 days  
b) Every 1-2 weeks  
c) Monthly  
d) Every 3 months  

Answer: B