Mental Health Medication Review

Outpatient Service

Incorporating deprescribing and tapering clinical services with a Clinical Pharmacist Prescriber.

Our service

Ashburn Clinic offers a Clinical Pharmacist Prescriber service to help patients:

- Who require individualised medication tapering plans to discontinue psychiatric medicines including antidepressants, benzodiazepines, mood stabilisers and antipsychotics.
- Understand psychiatric medicines.
- Understand medication adverse effects and suggest alternatives.
- With regular follow-up support during the tapering process.

Fees

Initial appointment *Assessment plus a written plan*	$320 for the first hour, then $215 per hour or part thereof
Follow-up appointment *Up to 30 minutes duration*	$215 per hour or part thereof
Late cancellation *Cancellation with less than 24-hours' notice*	A fee will be charged for missed appointments or late cancellations

NB: Some medications are not funded and may incur an additional cost.

Background

There are many reasons for wanting to stop medicines. These may include:

- Feeling that the medicine is no longer required.
- Adverse effects.
- The medicine is no longer effective.
- A desire to see if it is possible to manage mental health difficulties with less medication.

Some people find it very difficult to come off psychiatric medicines due to withdrawal symptoms. The severity of these symptoms may be reduced by slowly tapering off the medicine in smaller and smaller doses.

Further information

- A GP referral is required to make an appointment.
- The initial appointment is with a Clinical Pharmacist Prescriber who specialises in the management of psychiatric medicines. A full history will be taken, and a suggested plan regarding medications will be developed.
- A follow-up appointment will be scheduled to discuss the proposed plan, and practicalities such as ordering compounded liquids.
- Follow up appointments are usually 30 minutes every 2-4 weeks initially to amend the tapering plan and review withdrawal symptoms and discuss management of any emerging symptoms or underlying

psychological difficulties. For most people the frequency of appointments decreases as they become comfortable with the tapering process. Prescriptions will be provided if needed.

- We use rating scales to help assess withdrawal and may request these to be completed prior to a follow-up appointment.
- Adjustments to medications are made depending on the patient's preference, readiness and severity of withdrawal symptoms.
- The time it takes to taper off psychiatric medicines is hugely individual and dependent on several factors including which medicine(s) patients are stopping, how long they have been on it, the starting dose and severity of their withdrawal symptoms. For most people the process takes 6-12 months.
- If you are already experiencing withdrawal symptoms, a more individualised approach may be needed. This can include a longer initial assessment and, in some cases, involvement of a psychiatrist to support safe and effective planning.

Other Considerations

- **Timing**: tapering of psychiatric medications can cause withdrawal symptoms. We recommend patients find a time where they don't have big life events planned or are dealing with significant life stressors. If something comes up during the taper process, we can discuss pausing the taper.
- **Whānau | family support**: having the support of a trusted person during the process can be really helpful. Patients are encouraged to bring a support person with them.
- Making changes to psychiatric medications can be difficult for some people. We will fully discuss the risks and benefits of doing this, and ongoing follow-up and support will be offered. If at any time severe symptoms such as panic, sudden intense change in mood, or suicidality, is experienced, patients are asked to seek help with their GP or local emergency psychiatric services.
- Some medications such as compounded liquids to provide smaller dose increments for dose reductions may be recommended for which there will be an additional charge. There may be alternative options which will be discussed during the appointment.

About our Clinical Pharmacist Prescriber

Marleen van Oeveren is the clinical pharmacist at Ashburn Clinic. Her academic background and experience are in psychopharmacology, with a particular focus on deprescribing, and the psychological aspects of taking medicines for mental health difficulties. At Ashburn she works with patients to review and rationalise their medications and provide medication counselling. Marleen also teaches medical students and psychiatric registrars psychopharmacology at the University of Otago.

Get in touch:

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