

# Clinical Pearls

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## Clinical Pearl 03/03/20

Each week we will aim to bring out a concise email that provides 4-5 key pieces of information addressing a specific issue in clinical therapeutics.

**This week: Benzodiazepines in the Treatment of Psychiatric Disorders: A “Benz-wise” Approach in Prescribing**

**Mary Mickael – Clinical Pharmacist**

Benzodiazepines (BZD) are commonly divided into 2 groups depending on their half-life:

- Hypnotics: (Short half-life) e.g. alprazolam, oxazepam, temazepam
- Anxiolytics: (Long half-life) e.g. clonazepam, diazepam, flunitrazepam, nitrazepam

### **Use in anxiety:**

NICE recommends that BZD should not be routinely used in patients with GAD except for short-term measure during crisis. They may be helpful in panic disorders for short term. BZD are ineffective or potentially harmful in the treatment of phobias or PTSD.

### **Hypnotic effect:**

BZD are effective hypnotics, at least in the short-term. Physical causes (pain, dyspnoea, etc) or substance misuse (caffeine consumption) should always be excluded and CBT for insomnia should be offered before a hypnotic drug is prescribed.

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## **Use in depression:**

NICE suggests BZD may be helpful for up to two weeks early in treatment, particularly in combination with SSRI (to help with sleep and in the management of SSRI-induced agitation).

## **Use in Psychosis:**

BZD are commonly used for rapid tranquillisation. There is no convincing evidence that combining an antipsychotic and a BZD offers any advantage over the use of antipsychotics or BZD alone.

## **Use in dementia:**

BZD are widely used in BPSD but their use is poorly supported. BZD have been associated with cognitive decline, risk of dementia, risk of pneumonia and an increase in all-cause mortality and may contribute to increased risk of falls and hip fractures in the elderly population.

Please consider these issues when preparing or interpreting RMMR reports or education sessions. Contributions of content or suggested topics are welcome and should be sent directly to [natalie@wardmm.com.au](mailto:natalie@wardmm.com.au)