

**October 2016**

**Alert No: 25**

## **Gabapentin/pregabalin: Risk of death when taken with other CNS-depressant drugs**

An incident involving the death of an ELFT service user has highlighted the need for greater awareness of the risks of using gabapentin or pregabalin alongside other drugs that depress the central nervous system.

### **Learning points**

- Gabapentin and pregabalin can be used for the treatment of epilepsy and neuropathic pain. Pregabalin is also licensed for the treatment of generalised anxiety disorder.
- Gabapentin and pregabalin are associated with significant euphoric effects, which can result in misuse and dependence.
- Gabapentin and pregabalin are also known to cause depression of the central nervous system (CNS). This can lead to drowsiness, sedation, respiratory depression, and in extreme cases, death.
- The adverse CNS effects of gabapentin and pregabalin are additive when used with other centrally acting drugs, including:
  - Opioids (for example, morphine, oxycodone, methadone and heroin)
  - Alcohol
  - Antidepressants
  - Anti-emetics
  - Anti-epileptics
  - Antihistamines
  - Antipsychotics
  - Anxiolytics & hypnotics
  - Barbiturates
  - Skeletal muscle relaxants

### **Actions:**

All staff involved in the care of service users with a history of substance misuse, and staff who prescribe, supply or administer pregabalin or gabapentin must complete the following actions:

- Read the [Public Health England/NHS England joint guidance statement about the misuse of gabapentin and pregabalin](#).
- Inform any service users who use gabapentin or pregabalin about the risk of dependence, and about the risk of adverse effects if the medication is taken with other CNS-depressant drugs.
- Carefully weigh the risks against the benefits when using gabapentin or pregabalin in any service user with a history of drug misuse or dependence.