

# Alprazolam – Controlled Drug (Schedule 8)

## From 1 February 2014

From 1 February 2014, alprazolam will change from Schedule 4 drug to Controlled Drug (Schedule 8). The decision to change the schedule of alprazolam was made by the Department of Health on advice from the *Advisory Committee on Medicines Scheduling*, expert evidence, and public consultation submissions.

### Reasons for rescheduling

The reasons given for rescheduling alprazolam from Schedule 4 to Controlled Drug (Schedule 8) are:

- Alprazolam has increased morbidity and mortality in overdose with possible increased toxicity compared with other benzodiazepines.
- Alprazolam does not appear to have any additional therapeutic benefits compared with any other benzodiazepine.
- There has been a rapid increase in use of alprazolam compared with other benzodiazepines.
- There is evidence of widespread misuse particularly in association with opioids.
- The current pack size is inappropriate for the approved indications of short-term treatment of anxiety or panic disorder.
- Change to Controlled Drug (Schedule 8) does not restrict short-term use of alprazolam for approved indications.

### Implications for Residential Aged Care Facilities of alprazolam rescheduling

The *Guiding Principles for Medication Management in Residential Aged Care Facilities*, revised in 2012, promote a quality use of medicines (QUM) approach to medicines use and medication management, and are a useful resource for Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACF) to 'develop, implement, and evaluate locally specific policies and procedures.'

RACFs will already have policies and procedures around storage, administration and recording, which reflect relevant state/territory legislative and regulatory requirements for medicines including complementary, unscheduled, nurse-initiated, and scheduled medicines.

The rescheduling of alprazolam provides an opportunity to review and revise policies and procedures to reflect the change.

### Clinical information on alprazolam

Alprazolam:

- is one of the benzodiazepine group of drugs, also called hypnotics
- has a rapid onset of action (effects seen soon after oral dose given) and a short half-life (50% of the dose is cleared from the body after 24 hours)
- clinical indications include short-term treatment of generalised anxiety disorders, panic disorders and agoraphobia
- can cause cognitive impairment, has the potential for dependence and is therefore not recommended as first line treatment for insomnia, anxiety or panic disorders
- should be prescribed for short-term use only, for those residents who have not responded to other therapies
- because of its short half-life, residents who have been taking alprazolam regularly may experience withdrawal symptoms as early as the morning after the last night-time dose
- withdrawal symptoms are often mistaken as the underlying anxiety disorder and require careful monitoring and management.



PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA  
Pharmacy House, 44 Thesiger Court  
Deakin ACT 2600  
P: 1300 369 772  
E: [psa.nat@psa.org.au](mailto:psa.nat@psa.org.au)  
[www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au)

LEADING AGE SERVICES AUSTRALIA  
Unit 4, 21 Torrens Street  
Braddon ACT 2612  
P: 02 6230 1676  
E: [info@lasa.asn.au](mailto:info@lasa.asn.au)  
[www.lasa.asn.au](http://www.lasa.asn.au)

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### Checklist for RACF Managers

- ✓ Medication Advisory Committee informed of change in scheduling of alprazolam to Controlled Drug (S8) to facilitate any required changes to policies and procedures within the facility.
- ✓ Doctors providing services to residents informed of change in scheduling of alprazolam, as additional prescribing authority may be necessary for ongoing supply.
- ✓ Doctors may take the opportunity to review the resident's medicines, and may require a Schedule 8 prescribing permit for alprazolam.
- ✓ Pharmacists providing services to the facility, such as an approved QUM service provider, Residential Medication Management Review (RMMR) accredited pharmacist, and dispensing pharmacy, contacted to ascertain how they can assist the RACF to meet QUM and regulatory requirements.
- ✓ Nursing and other relevant staff, informed of change in scheduling of alprazolam to Controlled Drug (S8), and RACF requirements regarding drug storage, administration and recording.
- ✓ Residents and carers are informed, as appropriate, that the prescribing doctor may review their medication regimen, and provided with relevant information such as the National Prescribing Service (NPS) TEAM Aged Care *Getting a Good Night's Sleep*; Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) *The Good Sleep Guide*; or Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) *Panic disorders and agoraphobia: Australian treatment guide for consumers and carers*.

### Checklist for Director of Nursing/Nurse in Charge

- ✓ Alprazolam stock should be securely stored as outlined in your RACF policy and procedures for Controlled Drugs (Schedule 8 medicines). Alprazolam dispensed into dose administration aids should be secured as part of the usual procedure for individual resident medicines. Your QUM pharmacist or community pharmacy may provide assistance.
- ✓ Prepare necessary drug register for recording receipt and administration of alprazolam in line with your relevant state/territory legislative and regulatory requirements and RACF policy. Your QUM pharmacist or community pharmacy may provide assistance.
- ✓ Identify those residents currently prescribed alprazolam so that prescribers can: chart their medicine on the inpatient medication chart in the appropriate space for Controlled Drugs; review the resident's medication regimen; initiate a RMMR if clinically indicated; or seek necessary Department of Health permissions for ongoing supply. Your QUM pharmacist may assist with medication chart and state/territory legislative requirements, and your RMMR accredited pharmacist to assess clinical need and perform the RMMR.
- ✓ Consider initiating a drug use evaluation of alprazolam within the RACF to identify residents currently prescribed alprazolam and facilitate a review of their medicines by prescriber and pharmacist. The NPS drug use evaluation of hypnotics in the management of insomnia, and your QUM pharmacist may provide assistance.
- ✓ Consider organising a continuing education session for all nursing staff on Controlled Drugs, their storage, administration and recording. Your QUM pharmacist may provide assistance.

### Checklist for nursing and care staff

- ✓ Know your status regarding authorisation to administer medicines. The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (National Board) allows enrolled nurses (ENs) to administer medicines if they have completed relevant medicine administration education.
- ✓ Refer to local policies and procedures for medicines administration by care staff.
- ✓ Review the policies and procedures for medicines administration at your RACF. Is there a requirement for two authorised persons to check Controlled Drug administration?
- ✓ Familiarise yourself with the RACF Medication Advisory Committee policies and procedures for Controlled Drug storage, administration, and recording (including double checking and dose administration aids).
- ✓ Participate in any drug use evaluation of alprazolam initiated by the RACF.
- ✓ Participate in any staff education sessions on Controlled Drugs, including alprazolam, initiated by the RACF.

### Further information & resources

#### For RACF

- *Guiding Principles for Medication Management in Residential Aged Care Facilities*, Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government [https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/3B17BD9642D56802CA257BF0001AFDA5/\\$File/Guiding%20principles%20for%20medication%20management%20in%20residential%20aged%20care%20facilities.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/3B17BD9642D56802CA257BF0001AFDA5/$File/Guiding%20principles%20for%20medication%20management%20in%20residential%20aged%20care%20facilities.pdf)
- NSW Department of Health (2013): *Up-scheduling of alprazolam to Schedule 8: Information for Residential Aged Care Facilities*. <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pharmaceutical/Documents/alpraz-s8-racf.pdf>

#### For health professionals

- Department of Health, Victoria (2013): *Alprazolam to become Schedule 8: information for prescribers*. <http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/Alprazolam-to-become-Schedule-8-Information-for-prescribers-from-1-February-2014>
- Department of Veterans' Affairs, Veterans' MATES Topic 18: *Insomnia management (2009)*. <https://www.veteransmates.net.au/VeteransMATES/VeteransMATESServlet?page=site&m=10020>
- NPS News 65 (2009): *Anxiety disorders – which treatment for what anxiety disorder?* <http://www.nps.org.au/publications/health-professional/nps-news/2009/nps-news-65>
- NPS MedicineWise: *Medication Management in Residential Aged Care and Drug Use Evaluation kits*. [http://agedcare.nps.org.au/medication\\_mx](http://agedcare.nps.org.au/medication_mx)
- NPS: *DUE of hypnotic medicines for the management of insomnia in aged care facilities (2010)*. [http://agedcare.nps.org.au/monitor/due\\_agedcare](http://agedcare.nps.org.au/monitor/due_agedcare)
- NSW Department of Health: *Drug and Alcohol Withdrawal Clinical Practice Guidelines (2007)*. [http://www0.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/gl/2008/pdf/GL2008\\_011.pdf](http://www0.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/gl/2008/pdf/GL2008_011.pdf)
- PSA: *Guidelines for pharmacists providing Residential Medication Management Review and Quality Use of Medicines services (2011)*. <http://www.psa.org.au/guidelines/home-and-residential-medication-management-reviews>
- Therapeutic Guidelines Ltd: *Anxiety and associated disorders in Psychotropic medicines (2013)*.

#### For residents and carers

- DVA, Veterans' MATES *The Good Sleep Guide (2009)*. <https://www.veteransmates.net.au/VeteransMATES/VeteransMATESServlet?page=site&m=10020>
- NPS/TEAM Aged Care: *Getting a Good Night's Sleep (2010)*. [http://agedcare.nps.org.au/monitor/due\\_agedcare](http://agedcare.nps.org.au/monitor/due_agedcare)
- RANZCP: *Panic disorders and agoraphobia: Australian treatment guide for consumers and carers (2009)*. [https://www.ranzcp.org/Files/ranzcp-attachments/Resources/Publications/CPG/Australian\\_Versions/AUS\\_Panic\\_disorder-pdf.aspx](https://www.ranzcp.org/Files/ranzcp-attachments/Resources/Publications/CPG/Australian_Versions/AUS_Panic_disorder-pdf.aspx)

#### Brands of alprazolam currently available

- Alprax® tablets; Alprazolam Sandoz® tablets; Alprazolam-GA® tablets; Chemmart Alprazolam® tablets; GenRx Alprazolam® tablets; Kalma® tablets; Ralozam® tablets; Terry White Chemists Alprazolam® tablets; Xanax® tablets.