

Psychiatric Medication Awareness Group

May 28, 2008

The Honourable George Abbott MLA
Minister of Health
Room 337, Parliament Buildings
Victoria BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Abbott:

We are surprised and shocked to learn that a government appointed Pharmaceutical Task Force has recommended abolishing the BC Therapeutics Initiative. This body provides rational, objective information and recommendations on the best, most safe and cost effective medications to the citizens of British Columbia.

As advocates for reducing the serious risks associated with many psychiatric drugs (risks and side effects which I might add cost this province millions of dollars resulting from chronic health problems, diagnostic procedures, hospitalizations and death), we are very concerned that the one objective, non-industry funded source of information might be in jeopardy.

Among its many tasks, the TI produces excellent summations of medication use pattern that we have found invaluable in the development and promotion of better policy related to psychiatric drug use and responses. For example, a recent TI analysis on the utilization of benzodiazepines was widely used in training workshops we conducted with an international expert in the field of benzodiazepine dependence with the support of VIHA. These were attended by over 1200 health professionals including nurses, physicians, addictions specialists, psychiatrists, mental health workers and pain specialists. The data aggregated and published by the TI was invaluable. This is just one example of the irreplaceable work that the TI does.

Many of the visitors to our website and who contact us need assurance that psychiatric drugs are being vetted and reviewed for their safety and efficacy by an objective, independent source, rather than being influenced by those with ties to the pharmaceutical industry. On a wider societal level, this information is essential in the making of decisions that protect public health.

It is well known that the pharmaceutical industry influences information provided to government and to the public and that prescription drug costs are the most quickly rising component of health care costs. We are at a loss to understand why an agency that addresses both of these critical issues may be disbanded when it is so widely respected for the work it does.

We plan to post this letter on our website.

Yours truly,

Janet Currie
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