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### Physicians' attitudes and perceptions about Benzodiazepines: Portuguese National Survey

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**Background & Aim:** The chronic use of benzodiazepines (BZDs) is a relevant problem in primary care. In Portugal, BZDs consumption is up to three times higher when compared with other European countries. This study aims to characterize attitudes and perceptions of Portuguese physicians regarding the prescription, chronic use and withdrawal of BZDs.

**Method:** Cross-sectional survey, anonymous self-administered online questionnaires sent to all physicians registered in the Portuguese Medical Association. We collected information about physicians' demographics, clinical experience, and their agreement (5-points Likert scale) regarding benefits/risks of BZDs in the management of insomnia and anxiety, attitudes about prescription, chronic use and alternative non-pharmacologic approaches. Descriptive statistics were used and groups compared through Chi-square and Kruskal-Wallis tests ( $\alpha < 0.05$ ).

**Results:** A total of 359 physicians (56% GPs) participated, with a mean age of  $44.10 \pm 15.2$  years,  $19.03 \pm 14.9$  years of clinical experience, and 58% were female. Physicians were aware of BZDs' negative impact on cognitive function (89%), road traffic collisions (88%) and falls (79%). Only 42% disagree that chronic use is justified if the patient feels better, without having adverse events. Although 68% felt capable of helping patients to reduce/stop BZDs, 55% recognized difficulties on motivating them. Compared to other physicians, GPs were significantly more aware of BZDs impact on cognitive function and falls though more GPs consider that chronic use may be justified ( $p < 0.001$ ). Also, more GPs disagree about being capable to support patient withdrawal ( $p = 0.007$ ) and agree having difficulty on patients' motivation ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusions:** Physicians' awareness about risks of BZDs chronic use is high but their attitudes and perceived skills towards promoting BZDs withdrawal can be improved. Interventions in primary care are needed to capacitate GPs to better motivate patients on BZDs withdrawal.

Keywords: Benzodiazepines, long-term use, withdrawal, attitudes, physicians.

Competing Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest regarding the present study.