

## Prescription drug reclassification had ‘limited’ immediate impact, study finds

- The Home Office reclassified the prescription drugs **pregabalin and gabapentin** as class C drugs in April 2019 after concerns about misuse and addiction
  - The change in law made it **illegal to possess** the drugs without a prescription, and supply or sell them to others
  - Researchers at Keele University say the immediate impact of the reclassification was **‘limited’**, but fewer patients are now starting on these drugs
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### Reclassification had ‘limited’ impact

The reclassification of two prescription drugs as class C controlled substances, following concerns about people misusing and becoming addicted to them, had a ‘limited’ immediate impact according to a new study.

The drugs – pregabalin and gabapentin – became illegal to possess without a prescription and illegal to supply or sell to others in the UK from April 2019. The move came after experts highlighted the potential for misuse, and rising numbers of fatalities linked to the drugs.

But the research carried out by scientists at Keele University did find the number of patients being newly prescribed the medicines has now begun to fall.

Gabapentin and pregabalin, known as gabapentinoids, are used to treat nerve pain, epilepsy and anxiety, and can bring about an elevated mood in users. However, they can also have serious side effects, particularly when used in combination with other drugs.

### Research by Keele University’s School of Medicine

The study, published in *The Lancet Regional Health – Europe*, by a team of researchers from Keele University’s School of Medicine and Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, and funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), looked at how prescribing changed during the period before and immediately after they were reclassified as controlled drugs.

The study revealed although prescribing might have peaked in the UK, the immediate impact of their reclassification as controlled drugs on the frequency of gabapentinoid prescribing has been limited.

**"Little change overall"**

Lead author, Dr Julie Ashworth, Senior lecturer and Honorary Consultant in Pain Medicine, said: “While our study suggests that gabapentin prescribing may have peaked and fewer patients are being started on these drugs, there was little change in the proportion of patients receiving gabapentinoids overall. This is concerning given our findings that gabapentinoids are commonly prescribed with opioids and other central nervous system depressants.

“It also suggests that GPs are not stopping these drugs for existing users to any great extent, which may reflect the lack of other effective treatments and limited access to non-drug therapies for chronic pain in UK primary care.”