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## **Sleeping tablet study: The attitude of patients over 65 years to ceasing long term sleeping tablets**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this project was to assess elderly patients' use and knowledge of sleeping tablets and their attitude to stopping them.

### **Keywords**

patients, over, 65, years, ceasing, long, term, tablets, study:, sleeping, attitude, tablet

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# Sleeping Tablet Study



## The attitude of patients over 65 years to ceasing long term sleeping tablets

### Background

Sleeping tablets are prescribed for the short term treatment of insomnia, yet are often continued long term. They have significant adverse health effects in the elderly, with increased risk of falls, fractures, road traffic accidents and cognitive decline.

### Project aims

The aim of this project was to assess elderly patients' use and knowledge of sleeping tablets and their attitude to stopping them.

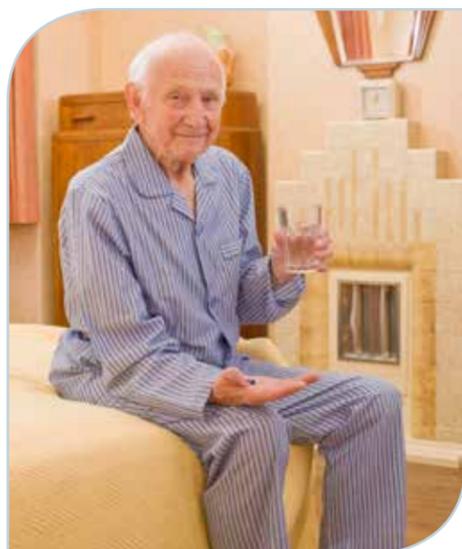
Seventeen patients aged over 65 from four Australian general practices took part in telephone interviews.

### Results

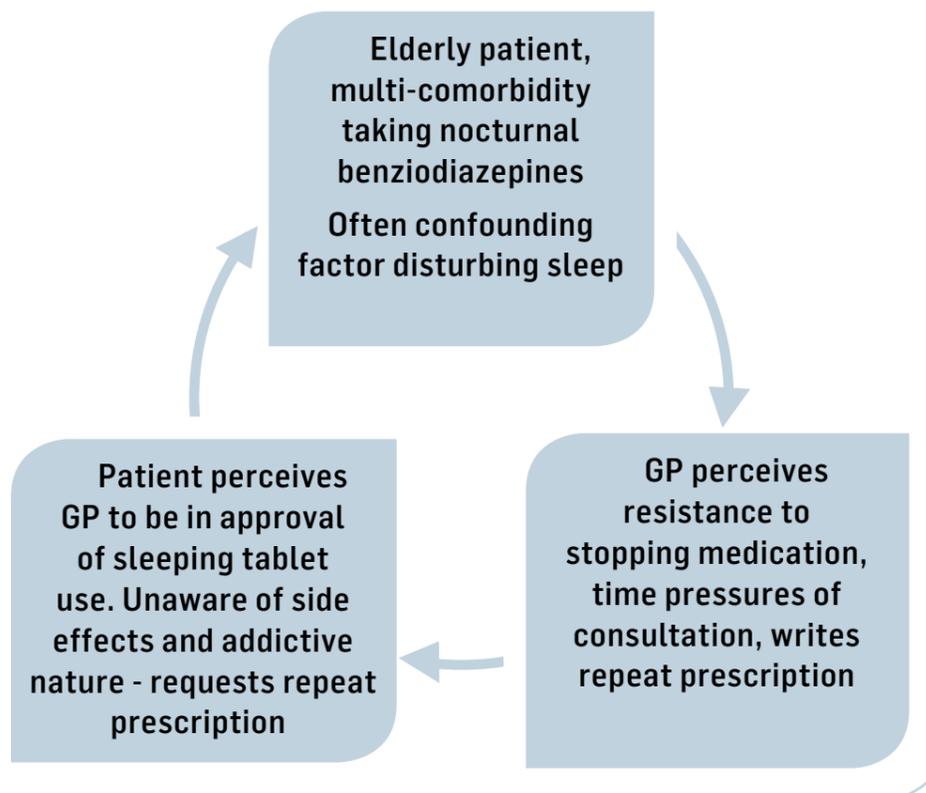
Many patients in the study had been taking the medication for some considerable time, despite limited benefit.

Sleeping tablets were often started at a time of stress and issues such as needing to use the bathroom or pain contributing to ongoing insomnia.

Previous studies have shown that GPs may be reluctant to challenge patients regarding sleeping tablet use because of anticipated resistance from patients and time constraints in an appointment.



### A circle of silence appears to exist around sleeping tablet use



The majority of patients showed willingness to cease medication. However, they did not see a need to as they were unaware of the side effects and the addictive nature of sleeping tablets.

Patients believed their GP approved the continued use of sleeping tablets because of the lack of challenge when requesting a repeat prescription. This facilitated ongoing use.

### Conclusion

Spending time with patients presenting for repeat prescriptions of sleeping tablets, discussing the cause of sleep disturbance, potential side effects of medication, availability of alternative options and exploring the need for ongoing use may reduce the use of this potentially harmful medication in the elderly.

### Key Findings

- sleeping tablets are not designed for the long term treatment of insomnia
- many patients are willing to cease the medication and are not resistant to change
- a thorough sleep history should be carried out for any patient presenting with insomnia
- confounding factors are often the cause of sleep disturbance, with more targeted treatments available
- patients presenting for repeat prescriptions of sleeping tablets should have a medication review performed to discuss side effects, addictive potential, alternative options and need for ongoing use.

This study was conducted by the Illawarra and Southern Practice Research Network (ISPRN) which is co-funded by the University of Wollongong's Graduate School of Medicine and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute.

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### About IHMRI

IHMRI is an independent health and medical research institute based on the University of Wollongong campus.

IHMRI's vision — *excellence and innovation in health and medical research supporting better health services leading to a healthier Illawarra community* — encapsulates our belief that by linking academic and clinician researchers around common health and medical issues, research findings can be rapidly translated into improved clinical practice in the Illawarra region and beyond.

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