

16 July 2026

Dear

ATISN 27171- Anti Depressant Protracted Withdrawal Syndrome

Thank you for your request which I received on 2 July. You asked for:

1. All information - paper, reports, electronic documents including emails and letters, regarding the symptoms of Antidepressant Protracted Withdrawal Syndrome (PSSD, PAWS and similar).
2. In relation to the long-term side effects of post antidepressant use being monitored and reviewed, provide all reviews since 2016 related to PSSD, PAWS and Protracted Withdrawal Syndrome including the broader range of symptoms.

Our Response

I can confirm the Welsh Government has not conducted a review of the long-term side effects of post antidepressant use related to PSSD, PAWS or Protracted Withdrawal Syndrome but does hold some of the information you have requested related to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's (MHRA's) review into how the potential risks associated with antidepressant medicines are communicated to patients. However, this information has been redacted under Section 41 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The information was obtained from a third party in circumstances importing an obligation of confidence. Disclosure would constitute an actionable breach of confidence, and the information is therefore exempt under Section 41 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

A rationale for the use of this exemption is provided at **Annex 1** to this letter.

Next Steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire

SK9 5AF

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely,

Annex 1

Section 41: Information provided in confidence

Section 41 sets out an exemption from the right to know where the information requested was provided to the public authority in confidence and disclosure of the information would give rise to an actionable breach of confidence.

S 41 Information provided in confidence:

(1) Information is exempt information if—

(a) it was obtained by the public authority from any other person (including another public authority), and

(b) the disclosure of the information to the public (otherwise than under this Act) by the public authority holding it would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that or any other person.

Section 41 is an absolute exemption and is not, therefore, subject to the public interest test. For the purposes of s41(1)(a), I can confirm that the information has been provided to Welsh Government by a third party.

‘Confidential’ is not defined in the Act; it’s a common law concept and the test of confidentiality involves determining whether information was obtained in confidence, whether the information has the necessary ‘quality of confidence’ and whether its disclosure would constitute an actionable breach of confidence. For the purposes of s41 a breach will always be actionable if:

- the information has the necessary quality of confidence;
- the information was imparted in circumstances importing an obligation of confidence; and
- there was an unauthorised use of the information to the detriment of the confider (the element of detriment is not always necessary).

This three stage test is taken from the case of *Coco v Clarke*. For the information in question, the Welsh Government believes it has the necessary ‘quality of confidence’; the information is not otherwise accessible and it is not trivial. Further, the information was communicated in circumstances importing an obligation of confidence.

The information withheld under section 41 was obtained from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to support ongoing discussions between the MHRA and the UK administrations concerning antidepressant safety and associated regulatory matters. The information was shared as part of established information-sharing arrangements and was not intended for wider dissemination. The MHRA's review of antidepressant safety remains an evolving area of regulatory work and, whilst information relating to the review has been published, confidential information continues to be shared between the MHRA and UK administrations to support policy and regulatory engagement.

The Welsh Government considers that the MHRA had a reasonable expectation that such information would be treated in confidence. The information was communicated in circumstances importing an obligation of confidence and retains the necessary quality of confidence. Disclosure would constitute an actionable breach of confidence

because consent for disclosure has not been obtained and disclosure would undermine established confidential information-sharing arrangements between the MHRA and the UK administrations.

The Welsh Government has considered whether there is a public interest defence that would justify disclosure notwithstanding the duty of confidence and has concluded that there is not. Information relating to the MHRA's review has subsequently been published by the MHRA, and can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/patient-and-family-experiences-inform-antidepressant-safety-information-review>. Confidential information continues to be shared between the MHRA and the UK governments to support engagement on medicines safety matters. Disclosure of information provided in confidence would undermine those established information-sharing arrangements and would not materially add to public understanding beyond information already placed in the public domain.

Section 41 is an absolute exemption under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and is therefore not subject to the public interest test contained within the Act.