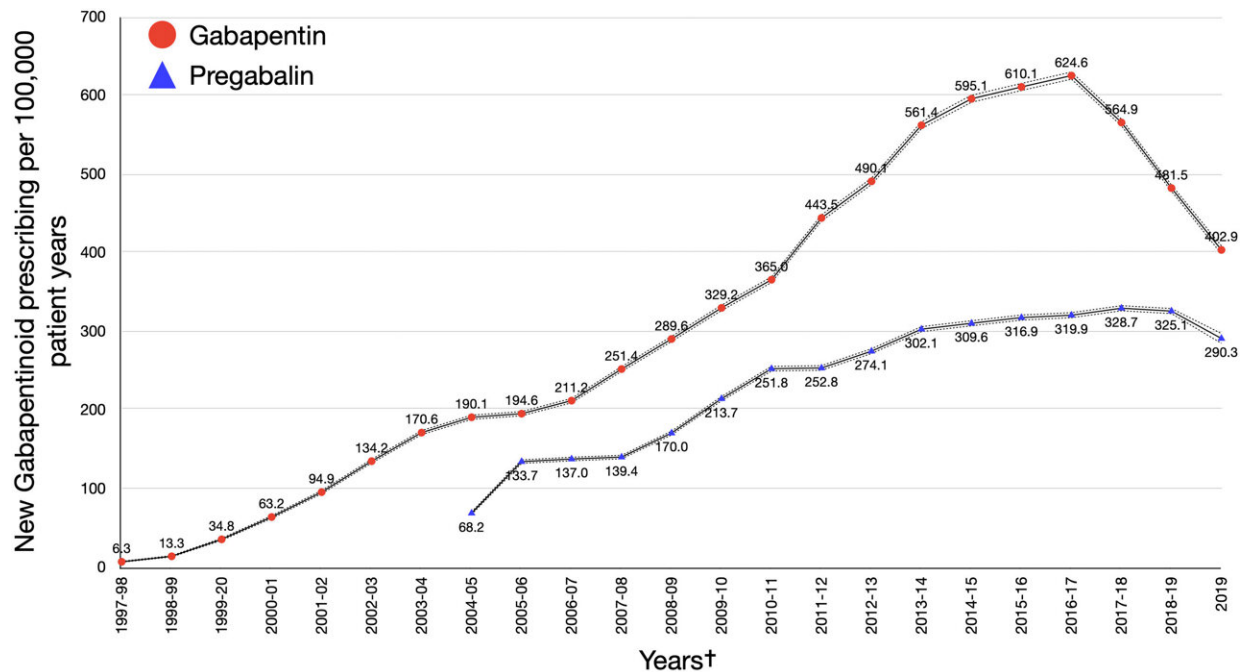


# Prescription drug reclassification had 'limited' immediate impact, study finds

March 14 2023



† Each date range from 1997-98 to 2018-19 represents a full year (1st April to 31st March). 2019 represents a half-year from 1st April to 30th September 2019

Annual rates of incident gabapentinoid prescribing (1997–2019) per 100,000 patient years. Credit: *The Lancet Regional Health - Europe* (2023). DOI: 10.1016/j.lanepe.2022.100579

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 U.K. 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.

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, 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 U.K., the immediate impact of their reclassification as controlled drugs on the prevalence 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 U.K. primary care."

**More information:** Julie Ashworth et al, Trends in gabapentinoid prescribing in UK primary care using the Clinical Practice Research Datalink: an observational study, *The Lancet Regional Health—Europe* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.lanepe.2022.100579](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2022.100579)

Provided by Keele University

Citation: Prescription drug reclassification had 'limited' immediate impact, study finds (2023, March 14) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-03-prescription-drug-reclassification-limited-impact.html>

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