



News Report Activity: Case 5

Case 5: 'Doctor who prescribed his own drugs said he was overworked and stressed' (Global headlines, 2016).



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Last updated 17:04, April 12 2016

A doctor who faked patient notes to prescribe himself drugs over an eight-year period said he did it because he was overworked and under stress.

The doctor, who has an interim suppression on his name, any details that identify him and his medical and health history, appeared before the Health Practitioners' Tribunal in Tauranga on Tuesday.

The Bay of Plenty doctor falsified the notes of 49 patients to gain access to Class B drugs, morphine, pethidine and fentanyl, and some Class C drugs, including tramadol and codeine, between July 2006 and September 2014. None of the 49 patients have been told.

The doctor was caught after a colleague became suspicious of the entries on the controlled drug register, which is used to keep a record of some of the drugs he prescribed. He also faked the signatures of three of his colleagues.

In total, he obtained more than 300 ampoules (glass vials) of controlled (Class B) drugs. It is unknown how many Class C drugs he obtained.

The doctor admitted to prescribing the drugs, and at the tribunal on Tuesday said his drug problem escalated in 2014. He said he was stressed and could not sleep and that his workplace was understaffed and he was expected to be on-call 24 hours a day and also deal with emergencies.

"When [I was caught], I felt a huge sense of relief," he said.

"Being a practitioner is rewarding, [but] I was frequently exposed to traumatic situations and also had a number of problems with my health. I did not control my anxiety and I began to use ..."





He said he had a history of alcoholism, but he chose medicine as a career because he enjoyed it and excelled at it.

"Medicine has become a large part of my identity," the doctor said.

"... I had access to a variety of drugs [and] as my drug use escalated, I began to rely on drugs. I was anxious about people finding out my substance abuse and [in 2014], the misuse was higher and more insurmountable than ever.

"I am deeply ashamed and remorseful. To protect my patients, this is something I take very seriously. My family and I have suffered greatly as a result of my addiction."

The doctor is still practising, but has since changed jobs and received professional help. He said he lost several relationships with colleagues and patients and has voluntarily entered into an agreement with his current employer to undergo random drug tests. He is also not able to prescribe controlled drugs.

The doctor faced five charges, which included making 266 fraudulent entries in the controlled drugs register to obtain drugs for a personal use, 49 fraudulent entries into patient notes and forging the signatures of three colleagues to obtain drugs for his personal use.

The lawyer for the Professional Conduct Committee, Anita Miller, argued that the doctor be censured, fined and special conditions be put in place. The conditions included advising prospective employers of his history and undergoing regular testing.

The chair of the tribunal, David Carden, had not delivered a judgment on Tuesday afternoon. He and the other four tribunal members were also considering an application for permanent name suppression of the doctor.

