

## **Depression blamed on the credit crunch**

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A LEADING Swansea GP has blamed the credit crunch for the soaring rate of anti-depressants prescriptions across the region.

Ian Millington (pictured), secretary of Morgannwg Local Medical Committee, said he was unsurprised at the prescribing levels because depression went hand-in-hand with poverty and unemployment.

More prescriptions have been handed out for medication including Prozac and Seroxat, during the last year compared to the previous 12 months.

Figures for Swansea Local Health Board alone show a total of 215,248 anti-depressants were dispensed during 2007/08 to around 16,557 patients.

Meanwhile, between 2006/07, around 15,084 patients were prescribed a total of 196,092 anti-depressants.

Dr Millington said he believed it was a sign of the times.

But a spokeswoman for Swansea Local Health Board pointed out that the figures were based on monthly, rather than weekly, prescriptions, implying the anti-depressants rates being prescribed could be less.

Dr Millington said: "It is probably a reflection of the stress of life, as we are in a high unemployment area.

"There is not much doubt that depression goes with unemployment and poverty, and the increase is not surprising if that is the case.

"There is evidence in recession that depression goes up.

"It's the reality of what is going on. People end up staying in unhappy jobs because they do not want to move."

Dr Millington said he believed the increase in prescriptions also underlined that the diagnosis of depression had improved.

"Modern anti-depressants work for depression — they do not work for unhappiness or general stress," he added.

"We are making the diagnosis of depression more now, and, most importantly, there is very little option to do anything else as there is not enough cognitive behaviour therapies — the services are there but they are overstretched."

The secretary of Morgannwg Local Medical Committee said it would not be fair to compare the picture in Wales with the rest of the UK, because there was a 14.1 per cent higher prevalence of disease than elsewhere.

In Neath Port Talbot during 2007/08 a total of 139,033 items were dispensed at a cost of £924,692, compared to 126,423 anti-depressants during 2006/07 at a cost of £988,338.

Meanwhile, in Carmarthenshire, a total of 155,053 anti-depressants were prescribed during 2007/08, costing £1,262,651 compared to 147,469 items, totalling £1,426,414, between 2006 and 2007.

Amy Kent, Carmarthenshire Local Health Board's head of prescribing and medicines management, added: "Although the prescribing of antidepressants has increased by a small percentage, costs have actually decreased as prescribers are using more cost effective drugs first choice, in line with National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance."