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Watlington Medical Centre
& Watlington Health

Medication for flying

We are occasionally asked by patients to prescribe sedating medication for flying.

We regret that henceforth we are not able to facilitate these requests on the grounds of patient safety and our need to prioritise the delivery of NHS care on the basis of patients' clinical needs.

Sedating medication, e.g. benzodiazepines such as diazepam, can render someone either paradoxically aggressive, or less able to follow instructions in an emergency, thus putting crew and other passengers at risk.

Sleeping tablets similarly have no indication for flying, and again could make a passenger difficult to rouse or transfer if there was a genuine in-flight emergency. Often passengers mix these medications with alcohol, with deleterious consequences. We would not wish you to be barred from a flight or face prosecution, or find yourself incapacitated due to the unpredictable effects of said medication.

The drug driving legislation which came into effect in recent years would also potentially prohibit onward driving from an airport.

Flight anxiety should be treated by Cognitive Behavioural Therapy - a form of counselling, which has long lasting benefits and is safe. Airline carriers offer excellent courses for free, so do speak with your flight provider to arrange to go on a course well in advance of when you know you will be flying.

It is not within the remit of the NHS to render someone fit to travel on a voluntary holiday or business trip, and due to the inexorable demands currently facing general practice, we make no apology for prioritising NHS care for patients on the basis of their clinical need.

We acknowledge there may be occasion when you have previously received a prescription for this purpose. We regret that we will be unable to agree to such requests henceforth. This is a joint decision, unanimously made by all senior clinical staff within the practice.

Patients are reminded that they are able to arrange a consultation at a private travel clinic should they wish to pursue the option of in-flight medication further, but we cannot accommodate their request and so would politely ask that they respect this universal practice policy.