Template letter re flying & benzodiazepines

1) the use of any sort of CNS depressant causes longer reaction times & slowed thinking, which during a flight will put the passenger at significant risk of not being able to act in a manner which could save their life in the event of a safety critical scenario (& there will be no-one else to do it for them - cabin crew are there to guide them & not do it for them);

2) the use of any sort of CNS depressant has potential to increase the risk of DVT - these drugs can induce non-REM sleep which tends to be of a type where the person does not move in their sleep, and therefore increases the possibility of sitting without moving for more than 4 hrs (the amount of time which has been shown to increase the risk of developing DVT whether in an aeroplane or elsewhere);

3) the sedating effects have the possibility of causing some respiratory depression, resulting in a drop in 02 sats. Normal sats for a healthy person at 8000ft are around 90%, so with the 2 effects added together, this may become significant, and even more so if the consumption of alcohol is added.

4) A paradoxical increase in aggression may be reported by patients taking benzodiazepines (see BNF) & therefore has potential to put other occupants of the aircraft at risk;

5) benzodiazepines are contraindicated in phobic states (see BNF);

6) for some countries it is illegal to import these drugs and so the passenger will need to use a different strategy for the homeward bound journey and / or any subsequent legs of the journey; in addition, standard GP indemnity does not cover you for treatment initiated outside the UK, so you would only be covered for doses to be taken on journeys starting in the UK;

7) NICE guidelines suggest that medication should not be used for mild & self limiting mental health disorders; in more significant anxiety related states - benzodiazepines, sedating antihistamines or antipsychotics should not be prescribed; Benzodiazepines are only advised for the short term use for a crisis in generalised anxiety disorder (if they are having a GAD crisis they are NOT fit to fly & fear of flying in isolation is not generalised anxiety disorder).