



Department
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*From Jo Churchill MP
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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 30 October to Matt Hancock on behalf of a number of your constituents about cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPMs).

I understand your concerns regarding access to medicinal cannabis. I realise the difficulties experienced by patients with chronic pain and other difficult to treat conditions. As you are aware, since 1 November 2018, specialist doctors on the Specialist Register of the General Medical Council (GMC) have been able to prescribe CBPMs where clinically appropriate and in the best interests of patients.

However, clinical guidelines from the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommend that CBPMs are not offered to manage chronic pain in adults, and that cannabidiol (CBD) only be offered as part of a clinical trial. NICE recognises the lack of evidence to support the use of these medicines and recommends that further research is carried out on the clinical and cost effectiveness of CBD as an add-on treatment for adults with fibromyalgia or persistent treatment-resistant neuropathic pain. Further information and the clinical guidelines can be found on the NICE website at nice.org.uk/guidance/NG144. While the evidence does not currently support the use of CBPMs in the treatment of fibromyalgia or chronic pain, the decision of whether to prescribe is one for clinicians to make on a case-by-case basis. NICE recommends that adults who started CBPMs to manage chronic pain on the NHS continue to do so until their clinician advises it is appropriate to stop.

As you may be aware, following his meeting with families of patients on 19 March 2019, the Secretary of State commissioned NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) to start a review of the barriers being faced by patients seeking access to CBPMs on NHS prescription. NHSE&I's report has now been published and the Department is working closely with it and other partners to implement the report's recommendations. A copy of the report is available at www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/barriers-accessing-cannabis-based-products-nhs-prescription.pdf.

There is a clear consensus that more evidence is required on the clinical and cost effectiveness of these medicines. To further understanding in this area, in addition to calling on the industry to produce evidence in a form that will support decisions about public funding, as is the case for any other medicinal product, the Government is promoting more high-quality research through the publicly funded National Institute for

Health Research (NIHR). The NIHR has issued two calls for research proposals, alongside its highlight notice on medicinal cannabis, and remains open to research proposals in this area as a priority. Departmental officials are working with the NIHR, health organisations, industry and researchers to encourage the development of good-quality proposals that will produce more evidence.

Your constituents may be interested to know that we have changed the way we regulate imports of CBPMs, to reduce costs, by allowing licensed importers to import a small additional supply. This supply can be drawn on when a prescription is given from a specialist doctor, reducing the amount of time a patient may have to wait for their medicine. We are continuing to work with industry to identify what more we can do to minimise the cost of these medicines when they are prescribed either privately or on the NHS.

Meanwhile, I would advise patients who believe these products may be of benefit to them to continue to discuss their on-going treatment with those responsible for their care.

I hope this reply is helpful to your constituents.



JO CHURCHILL