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The Medicinal Use of Cannabis

Thank you for contacting me about the legalisation of cannabis for medicinal use.

Cannabis in its raw form is not recognised as having any medicinal purposes. The licensing regime for medicines is administered by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), which issues licences for medicines in the UK which have been tested for their safety, quality and efficacy.

A medicine derived from the cannabis plant, Sativex, has already been licenced for use in the treatment of spasticity due to multiple sclerosis (MS). The MHRA is open to considering other licence applications for medicines containing cannabinoids should such products be developed. You may be pleased to hear that the Minister for Safeguarding, Vulnerability and Crime has recently written to and met with the Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Public Health and Primary Care to consider how to ensure cannabis-based medicines are available where appropriate.

In 2014, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published its clinical guideline on the management of MS that does not recommend Sativex as a cost effective use of NHS resources. In the absence of positive guidance from NICE, it is for health commissioners in each area to make decisions on whether to fund this treatment based on an assessment of the available evidence.

I do appreciate that there are people with chronic pain and debilitating illnesses who seek to alleviate their symptoms by using cannabis. Although such use is illicit, the Sentencing Council's guidelines on drug offences identify such circumstances as a potential mitigating factor and I am sure that everyone will agree that such discretion is exercised with humanity and common sense.

The use of cannabis for medicinal purposes is an issue on which research and knowledge will no doubt continue to grow and which, I am sure, will be kept under review.

The Government has no plans to legalise the recreational use of cannabis. The official advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs cites medical and scientific research showing that cannabis use has a number of adverse acute and chronic health effects, especially for people with mental health problems, and continues to present a significant public health issue.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP