

**From the Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Michael McBride**



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

## **HSS(MD) 51/2020**

### **FOR ACTION**

Chief Executives of HSC Trusts  
GP Medical Advisers, Health and Social Care Board  
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward distribution to practice staff)  
Director of Integrated Care, Health and Social Care Board  
Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Health and Social Care Board (for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies)

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 51/2020

Date: 21 July 2020

### **PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST**

Dear Colleague

### **CANNABIS-BASED MEDICINAL PRODUCTS - UPDATE**

Since 1 November 2018 specialist doctors on the Specialist Register of the General Medical Council (GMC) have been able to decide whether to prescribe cannabis-based medicinal products where there is an unmet clinical need. This letter is addressed to those of you who are in the position of deciding whether to prescribe cannabis-based medicinal products. We appreciate that this comes with challenges, and so we want to highlight some recent developments in this area and some new resources that have been developed to support you in making clinical decisions for the benefit of the people that you care for.

### **Re-scheduling of Epidyolex® and insertion of a new definition under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002.**

Following a recommendation from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) Epidyolex®, a cannabis-based medicinal product, was rescheduled from Schedule 2 of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002 to Schedule 5 under a specified definition. This legislative change came into effect on 24 June 2020 and means that Epidyolex® has become exempt from most of the requirements of controlled drugs such as register, prescription and safe custody requirements. Further details about this change are available on the [Department's website](#).

## **NICE Clinical Guidance and Technology Appraisals**

In November 2019 the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on the use of cannabis-based medicinal products (NG144) covering prescribing of cannabis-based medicinal products for people with intractable nausea and vomiting, chronic pain, spasticity and severe treatment-resistant epilepsy. Subsequently in December 2019 NICE recommended the use of cannabidiol with clobazam for treating seizures associated with Dravet syndrome (TA614) and with Lennox–Gastaut syndrome (TA615). NICE clinical guideline NG144 and both Epidyolex® Technology Appraisals have now been formally endorsed for implementation in Northern Ireland, and Epidyolex® has been approved for use in Northern Ireland under the [HSCB Managed Entry process](#).

## **Refractory Epilepsy Specialist Clinical Advisory Service (RESCAS)**

In order to support paediatric neurologists who are considering prescribing cannabis-based medicinal products for paediatric patients with severe treatment-resistant epilepsy, Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) is hosting a new UK-wide clinical service. The Refractory Epilepsy Specialist Clinical Advisory Service (RESCAS) provides a forum for the discussion of difficult epilepsy cases that have presented diagnostic and/or management difficulties and have proven refractory to treatment. Further details and a referral form for contacting the advisory service are available on the [Department's website](#).

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

The Department has revised and updated a set of clinical Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) which are available on the [Department's website](#). This document will be updated on a regular basis and is intended to provide additional support to healthcare professionals who may be faced with questions about this rapidly changing area of practice, and prescribers who may be considering whether to prescribe a cannabis-based medicinal product for patients under their care.

## **Next steps**

The Department continues to work closely with colleagues in the other UK countries to implement the recommendations from NHS England's report on [Barriers to accessing cannabis-based products for medicinal use on NHS prescription](#) for the benefit of patients in Northern Ireland, such as establishing clinical trials to further the evidence base and scoping the development of a national UK patient registry to collect a uniform dataset, across all indications, for patients prescribed a cannabis-

based medicinal product in the UK. We will endeavour to keep you updated with developments in these areas as they progress.

Yours sincerely



**DR MICHAEL McBRIDE**  
Chief Medical Officer



**MRS CATHY HARRISON**  
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

### **Circulation List**

Executive Medical Director/Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency (for onward distribution to all relevant staff)  
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency  
Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts  
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Professor Colin Adair, Director of the NI Centre for Pharmacy Learning and Development, QUB

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This letter is available on the Department of Health website at  
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>  
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