

To: All General Practitioners and  
Practice Pharmacists

All Community Pharmacists

CC: Trust Chief Executives  
(for onward cascade to appropriate  
staff)

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Dear Colleague

## **CANNABIS-BASED PRODUCTS FOR PAIN**

Following a recent increase in referrals to secondary care pain clinics the purpose of this letter is to clarify the position regarding referral of patients to secondary care for a cannabis-based product for pain.

**At this time patients should not be referred to secondary care for cannabis-based products for pain due to the lack of good evidence associated with their use and the risk of adverse effects.<sup>1-8</sup> This includes neuropathic, non-malignant and cancer pain.**

There are currently no cannabis-based products routinely commissioned for use in Northern Ireland<sup>9</sup>. Both the Faculty of Pain Medicine and British Pain Society support the view that further research is required to evaluate the safety, efficacy and harms of cannabis-based preparations in pain management.<sup>6, 7</sup> Specialists also await NICE guidance to support the prescribing of cannabis-based products. This is expected by October 2019.

Prescribers and Community pharmacists are reminded that patients with persistent pain often have complex comorbidities and a multidisciplinary and multifaceted approach to management is likely to be more effective than reliance on medicines alone.

This letter refers to the use of cannabis-based products for pain. Consideration may be given to making a referral to secondary care for a cannabis-based product where it is clinically appropriate,<sup>10,11</sup> for example, a child with one of the rare forms of epilepsy that might be helped by medical cannabis.<sup>12</sup>

Further information on cannabis-based products for medicinal use can be found in additional guidance recently issued by the Department of Health.<sup>13</sup> This includes:

- A link to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Cannabis-based products for Medicinal Use, and
- Clarification on the different cannabis-based products.

### **ACTION: GP PRACTICES AND COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS**

At this time patients should not be referred to secondary care for a cannabis-based product for pain. Patient queries and expectations regarding the use of cannabis-based products should be managed in line with the advice in this letter.

Please contact your local Pharmacy or Medical Adviser if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely



**Joe Brogan**  
**Assistant Director of Integrated Care**  
**Head of Pharmacy and Medicines**  
**Management**



**Dr Margaret O'Brien**  
**Assistant Director of Integrated Care**  
**Head of GMS**

#### **Contact details for Local Integrated Care Offices:**

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4. Guidance for the use of medicinal cannabis in Australia. Overview. Version 1 December 2017. <https://www.tga.gov.au/sites/default/files/guidance-use-medicinal-cannabis-australia-overview.pdf>
5. Cannabis for Medical Use - A Scientific Review. Health Products Regulatory Authority. January 2017. <https://www.hpra.ie/docs/default-source/publications-forms/newsletters/cannabis-for-medical-use---a-scientific-review.pdf?sfvrsn=7>

6. <https://www.britishpainsociety.org/mediacentre/news/bps-position-statement-on-the-medicinal-use-of-cannabinoids-in-pain-management/>
7. <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/FPM%20Cannabis%20Position%20Statement%20Oct18.pdf>
8. <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/recommendations-cannabis-based-products-medicinal-use>
9. <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hss-md-28-2018.pdf>
10. <http://primarycare.hscni.net/download/DocLibrary/Pharmacy/Correspondence/Cannabis-based-Products-for-Medicinal-Use-Primary-Care. .pdf>
11. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/medicinal-cannabis>
12. [https://bpna.org.uk/userfiles/BPNA\\_CBPM\\_Guidance\\_Oct2018.pdf](https://bpna.org.uk/userfiles/BPNA_CBPM_Guidance_Oct2018.pdf)
13. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/letter-additional-guidance-on-cannabis-based-products-for-medicinal-use.pdf>