

# ACMD

## Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

Chair: Professor Les Iversen

Secretary: Zahi Sulaiman

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Rt Hon. Mike Penning MP

Minister of State for Policing, Criminal Justice and Victims

Home Office

2 Marsham Street

London

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27 August 2015

Dear Minister,

### **RE: Update on the ACMD's inquiry on diversion and illicit supply of medicines**

I am writing to update you on the progress of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs' (ACMD) inquiry on diversion and illicit supply of medicines.

The ACMD began this inquiry in January 2014 under the chairmanship of Professor Ray Hill. We wrote to professional bodies and organisations including the Royal College of Nurses, Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and the Royal College of Physicians, and requested submissions to the inquiry to inform our findings. We also considered submissions from the USA and other EU Member States, in order to better understand the experiences of diversion and illicit supply of medicines in other countries. Although the inquiry's final report is not yet complete, I can report the ACMD's interim findings and conclusions.

#### **Interim findings**

The submissions received by the inquiry to date suggest that:

- Diversion and illicit supply of medicines is of increasing public concern in the UK.
- There is no evidence for diversion and illicit supply of medicines of a magnitude similar to that in the US.
- Diversion of medicines *mainly occurs* after a drug has been prescribed in the community.
- There is no evidence of major diversion from wholesale stocks for illicit use, neither is there a correlation between wholesale supplies and levels of prescribing.

- Although there has been a rise in the prescribing of abusable medicines, particularly opioids in the UK, this has not been accompanied by an increase in opioid abuse or in opioid related deaths.<sup>1</sup>

### **Interim conclusions**

- The lack of quantitative data in the evidence we have collected so far points to a need for better data collection in the future as a way of monitoring the situation and ensuring that we do not ignore the cautionary lesson of events in the United States.
- It is important to contextualise the situations in the US and the UK. The differences in the UK's culture and healthcare system as compared to the US are likely to be protective in relation to the diversion and illicit supply of medicines.
- Wholesale stock levels have little impact on prescribing, diversion and misuse of medicines in the UK.

We look forward to reporting on our complete findings later this year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Les Iversen".

**Professor Les Iversen FRS**

cc Rt. Hon. Theresa May, MP, Home Secretary  
Rt. Hon. Jeremy Hunt, MP, Secretary of State for Health  
Rt. Hon. Jane Ellison, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health

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<sup>1</sup> Wiesberg et al (2014) Prescription opioid misuse in the United States and the United Kingdom: Cautionary lessons. Int J Drug Policy 25: 1124-1130.