

Press release: New expert panel set up to advise on medicinal cannabis licence applications

From today (27 June) an expert panel will begin accepting applications from senior clinicians to prescribe cannabis-based medicines.

Announced in Parliament last week by the Policing Minister, the panel will be led by the Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland, Dr Michael McBride.

The panel, who will meet for the first time this week, will assess individual applications for the prescription of cannabis-based products based upon set criteria to ensure the treatment is safe. These applications must be made by senior clinicians who are on the General Medical Council's register with an active licence to practice.

The process has been designed to be swift and accessible. Once the panel has made its recommendation to Ministers, it will be for the Home Office or the Department of Health in Northern Ireland to determine whether to issue a licence and any application can expect to receive a final decision within two to four weeks.

The Government is also committed to reviewing the fees paid for licences that are awarded as a result of the advice of the expert panel.

Policing Minister, Nick Hurd said:

I completely sympathise with the families who have been facing desperate situations to find treatment and we have taken action, creating an expert panel to review individual medicinal cannabis licence applications.

Clinicians must be at the heart of the process to provide the reassurance that prescribing unlicensed and potentially untested products is in the best interests of the patient.

I look forward to receiving the expert panel's recommendations in the knowledge that these families will be prescribed the most appropriate course of treatment, firmly based on medical evidence. We have been clear that we will continue to push hard against any unnecessary bureaucracy in the system.

Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland Dr Michael McBride said:

The establishment of this Panel means that applications from patients' doctors to prescribe, supply and provide access to

cannabis-related medicines can now be considered and endorsed on the basis of best clinical practice in order to ensure safe and appropriate care for patients.

The Government also committed today to urgently reviewing the fees paid for licences that are awarded as a result of the advice of the expert panel. In the meantime, for applications for a licence made by the NHS, neither individual patients nor their families will be asked to make any financial contribution towards the cost of any licence that may be issued.

Last week the Home Secretary also announced a two-part review looking at the scheduling of cannabis, which will be carried out by Chief Medical Officer Professor Dame Sally Davies and the Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs. The expert panel is an interim measure whilst the review is ongoing.

The Home Secretary received part one of the review today [27 June] and will commission part two from the ACMD within the next few days. If this review identifies significant medicinal and therapeutic benefits, then the intention would be to reschedule medicinal cannabis and related products for therapeutic use.

Notes to editors:

Clinical [applications can be made on GOV.UK](#).

Applications must be made by senior clinicians who are on the General Medical Council's relevant specialist register with an active licence to practice

The panel will assess applications against several criteria. They are:

- Whether there is evidence from a patient's own case that they have benefited from a cannabis-based medicine; or,
- Whether there is evidence from existing clinical trials which indicate that a patient will benefit from a cannabis-based medicine; or,
- Whether the clinician considers there is an otherwise unmet special clinical need that could be addressed through use of a cannabis-based medicine by the patient.