[CMA to investigate the supply of bipolar drug]

Press release

The CMA has opened an investigation into suspected anti-competitive practices in the supply of drugs used to treat bipolar disorder.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) will investigate whether the pharmaceutical company Essential Pharma has abused a dominant position in relation to lithium-based medicines for treating bipolar disorder, which it sells under the brand names 'Priadel' and 'Camcolit', by proposing to withdraw the supply of Priadel to UK patients. The withdrawal of Priadel would mean that thousands of patients need to switch to alternative, more expensive, lithium treatments, such as Camcolit.

The vast majority of patients in the UK taking a lithium-based drug to manage their symptoms rely on Priadel. The proposed removal of Priadel prompted serious concern from medical bodies and charities who said that switching bipolar medication can be a difficult process for patients and may cause health complications, as well as significantly raising costs. This is particularly concerning at a time when the national health service is under unprecedented pressure because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) had requested that the CMA impose 'interim measures' to pause the withdrawal of Priadel while the investigation is ongoing. However, following the opening of the CMA's investigation, Essential Pharma has informed DHSC that it will continue to supply the drug to facilitate discussions on pricing, removing the immediate threat to patients. The CMA's investigation remains open as the threat of withdrawal remains unless a satisfactory agreement is reached on price.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA said:

> Thousands of people across the UK rely on lithium-based drugs to manage bipolar disorder, so it's important that we protect their

interests by scrutinising potential competition concerns to reach a fair conclusion as quickly as possible.

We welcome Essential Pharma's decision to continue supply for the time being, while it tries to reach an agreement with the Department of Health and Social Care on price.

The investigation by the CMA is ongoing and no decision has been made as to whether the law has been broken.

More information can be found on our investigation into supply of lithium-based medication case page.

Notes for editors

1. The CMA has reasonable grounds to suspect that Essential Pharma may have infringed the Chapter II prohibition of the Competition Act 1998 and has decided to open the investigation in accordance with its Prioritisation Principles.

2. The Chapter II prohibition of the Competition Act 1998 prohibits the abuse of a dominant position by one or more undertakings which may affect trade within the UK or a part of it.

3. The CMA may impose interim measures under section 35 of the Competition Act 1998 if it has opened but not yet completed an investigation and it is necessary to act urgently to prevent significant damage to a specific person or category of persons or to protect public interest. If the CMA decides to impose interim measures, it may impose interim directions which will apply until the investigation is concluded.

4. At the end of an investigation, the CMA may impose a financial penalty on any business found to have infringed the Chapter II prohibition of up to 10% of its annual worldwide group turnover. In calculating financial penalties, the CMA takes into account a number of factors including seriousness of the infringement(s), turnover in the relevant market and any mitigating and/or aggravating factors.

5. Find more information about Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) data for NHS England, which shows the number of prescriptions for Priadel.

6. Read a public letter to Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, on the proposed withdrawal of Priadel, signed by medical bodies and charities.

7. As set out in the CA98 guidance, the CMA will name a party under

investigation in exceptional circumstances. In this case, the CMA is naming Essential Pharma because the subject matter of the investigation (the withdrawal of Priadel by Essential Pharma) is of widespread public concern.

8. For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.

Published 6 October 2020

New Chair of The Social Security Advisory Committee appointed

Press release

Dr. Stephen Brien is confirmed as the new Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee.

The Department for Work and Pensions announced that Dr. Stephen Brien has been appointed as Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC).

The Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) is an independent statutory body that provides impartial advice on social security and related matters. It scrutinises most of the complex secondary legislation that underpins the social security system.

Dr. Stephen Brien was selected for the huge wealth of experience he has amassed, after working with organisations domestically and abroad committed to improving the lives of the most vulnerable.

Stephen has brought analytical and consulting experience to diagnosing the issues and developing implementable solutions, including through his work developing welfare reform agendas with the Centre for Social Justice.

Speaking on his appointment, the Lords Minister for Work and Pensions Baroness Stedman-Scott said:

> I am pleased to announce that Dr. Stephen Brien will be the next Chair of The Social Security Advisory Committee.
>
> Over the last 25 years, Stephen has worked across academic, professional services, government and third-sector organisations.
>
> Stephen brings a breadth of leadership experience across a range of public services and his insights on policy will be invaluable. I look forward to working with him.
>
> I also thank Liz Sayce for all of her contributions as Interim Chair, her work has been truly appreciated.

Dr. Stephen Brien said:

> I am delighted to be appointed as Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee. The Committee plays an important role contributing to the development of a social security system that works for all. I would like to thank Liz Sayce and Carl Emmerson for all their contributions as Interim Chair and Vice Chair respectively, and look forward to working with them and the other committee members in providing constructive and independent advice to the Government.

Dr. Brien will take up his post from 14 September 2020 for a four-year term and will replace Liz Sayce, Acting Chair, who stood down on 31 August 2020.

Further information

- The Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee is appointed by the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions. This appointment was made following an open competition regulated by The Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments.

- Remuneration for the Chairman’s role is £22,000 for a minimum of 60 days per annum.

- For more information about the Social Security Advisory Committee can be found here.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5144

Follow DWP on:

Published 6 October 2020
Last updated 6 October 2020 + show all updates

1. 6 October 2020

   First published.

2021 UK-Taiwan Innovative Industries programme: request for proposal

World news story

British Office and the Ministry of Science and Technology launch the UK-Taiwan Innovative Industries programme (I2P).

To strengthen the exchange and co-operation between academic and research circles of the UK and Taiwan, the British Office Taipei and the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) are proud to jointly launch the (I2P).

The programme aims to facilitate deep bilateral co-operation with a view to enhancing scientific research capability, developing international co-operative relationships, and participating in large-scale international programmes.

There are two categories of the programme: bilateral researcher placements and virtual workshops with an emphasis on:

- UK’s 4 Grand Challenges industrial policy: artificial intelligence and data, ageing society, clean growth, future of mobility
- Taiwan’s 6 Core Strategic Industries: information and digital technology, cybersecurity, biotech and medical technology, national defense, green and renewable energy, and strategic stockpile industries
- 5+2 Innovative Industries: intelligent machinery, IoT, green energy, biomedicine, new agriculture, and circular economy

We welcome applications from any UK or Taiwan-based researcher, including PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. We encourage scientific research personnel to conduct theme-based collaborative research or preliminary exploration. This can be done through topic specific collaboration with universities & colleges, public research institutions, catapults, and related industrial sectors in the UK and Taiwan.

See UK-Taiwan I2P call for applications: information and guidance (ODT, 39.3KB) for more information.

Deadline to send application is 26 October 2020. If you have any questions, please contact Guy Robertson, Senior Science and Innovation Officer at British Office.

Published 6 October 2020

Property investment companies shut down after misappropriating £2.85m

Minerva Development Group Limited and Cohesion Business Development Ltd were wound up in the public interest on 29 September 2020 after the High Court found that the investment-raising activities of the companies were entirely without substance, with at least £2.85 million of investors’ funds – raised through issuing of bonds – had disappeared.

The orders were made before Insolvency and Companies Court Judge Prentis and the Official Receiver has been appointed as liquidator.

During the proceedings, the court heard that Minerva Development Group was incorporated in January 2016 but actively traded from 2018 until late 2019, principally through two websites, offering prospective clients a variety of residential property and student accommodation bonds.

Clients were offered investment returns between 7% and 16.9% per annum – above the typical return rates for regulated investment products– and told their investments would be made secure through a ‘Security Trustee’ which would oversee the application and banking of funds.

Investors started to complain, however, about Minerva Development Group before the Insolvency Service carried out confidential enquiries. Investigators uncovered that Minerva Development Group received £2.85 million from 70 investors after they paid their funds into a wide range of non-company bank accounts, escrow accounts or onto pre-paid cards.

But these accounts were not secure, and the alleged security trustee – first via a company called Glaxicon Limited followed by Cohesion Business Development – provided no protection.

On their website, Cohesion Business Development promoted itself as an experienced financial services provider, and a tax and accounting firm, with over 30 employees located across the world. Investigators, however, found that Cohesion Business Development never had any official presence at its registered office in Mayfair, London.

Investigators also uncovered investors complained to the police after claiming they didn’t receive any investment returns and the company failed to correspond with them.

This led to Minerva Development Group’s website being shut down, which prevented further bonds being sold. But this triggered several ‘recovery’ agents approaching investors promising to recover their investments for an advanced fee.

These recovery agents fabricated their legitimacy and one firm falsely told investors that they had been instructed by the Insolvency Service, misleading clients into believing Minerva Development Group was in the process of going through a liquidation.

Both Minerva Development Group and Cohesion Business Development were not authorised by the financial regulators and failed to cooperate with investigators, who were concerned that the appointed directors in the two companies were likely to be fictitious or hijacked names used to hide their true identities.

David Hill, Chief Investigator for the Insolvency Service, said:

> Minerva Development Group persuaded clients to part with substantial sums of money to invest in property bonds with the promise of extremely generous returns. In reality, this was nothing but a scheme and our investigations found that no funds were invested into bonds but instead used to benefit those running Minerva Development Group and a connected company, Cohesion Business Development.
>
> The courts recognised the severity of the companies’ misconduct and closed them down to protect any further investors coming to harm. We urge potential investors to carry out rigorous due diligence to ensure they use their funds on legitimate invesments.

All enquiries concerning the affairs of the company should be made to the Official Receiver of the Public Interest Unit:

Minerva Development Group Limited (company number 09944685), was incorporated on 11 January 2016. Its registered address has reverted to a Companies House default address and on the basis that it has no valid registered address. The current appointed directors of Minerva are Simon Phipps and Paul Edwards.

Cohesion Business Development Ltd (company number 10385105), was incorporated on 20 September 2016. The company's registered office address is at 11 Bruton Street, Mayfair, London, W1J 6PY. The company has never had an authorised presence at that address. The company's current appointed director is a Paul Redford.

The 3 current directors across both companies all give 11 Bruton Street as their correspondence address, an address at which none of them are known to have had any authorised use of.

The petitions were presented by The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on 27 August 2020 in the High Court of Justice, Business and Property Courts in England and Wales (CR-2020-003575 of 2020), under the provisions of section 124A of the Insolvency Act 1986 following confidential enquiries by Company Investigations under section 447 of the Companies Act 1985, as amended.

About the Insolvency Service

Company Investigations, part of the Insolvency Service, uses powers under the Companies Act 1985 to conduct confidential fact-finding investigations into the activities of live limited companies in the UK on behalf of the Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS). Information about how to complain about a live company.

Information about the work of the Insolvency Service.

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

HMCI commentary: findings from visits in September

This autumn, we are working differently. While routine inspections of education and social care providers have been suspended, we will be carrying out thousands of visits to schools, colleges, nurseries, children's homes, local authorities and other providers of education and children's social care. Our aim is to explain how these providers are getting back to education and meeting the needs of children and older learners, while managing the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are hearing directly from the leaders of these institutions, so we can help others understand what's being done in sometimes extraordinary circumstances – whether that's parents, other professionals working in these fields, or the government. Today, we have published the first of 3 sets of reports on what we are learning from our visits, focusing on schools and children's homes. In November, we will broaden our reports to cover visits made in October to further education colleges and local authorities, as well as virtual visits to nurseries – and include consideration of services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

I'm hugely grateful to the schools that put themselves forward for our pilot visits. It should be noted that the schools findings we are reporting today are drawn exclusively from this volunteer group.

The return to school in September was quite unlike any that we'd seen before; children returned to schools that had been reorganised to combat the spread of the virus. Leaders told us they had struggled at times to keep up with the guidance from government, but nevertheless it was clear from our visits that schools had carefully considered how to apply that guidance in their own context. The use of bubbles was prevalent in primary schools, with secondaries augmenting that tactic with timetable changes that limited the movement of children around school.

In the lead up to September, there had been much speculation about attendance when schools returned. Those we visited generally reported decent attendance figures – often comparable with other years – but parental anxiety remains an issue. Leaders reported their frustrations at having to correct the myths that had taken hold with some parents, often fuelled by 'fake news' shared on social media.

Myths can also grow and circulate among schools about what they 'have' to do, or not do: no singing; no swimming; all doors open, no matter the weather… Successfully rebutting these myths, which spread so easily, is hard. Like Japanese knotweed, myths have persistent roots – so a consolidation and simplification of government advice for schools would help bring clarity for teachers and parents alike as we head towards the winter.

Perhaps worryingly, over a third of the schools we visited for this report had noted more parents opting to home educate their children. Some parents will have made a positive choice, after enjoying their summer experience at home, but many leaders believed parents were concerned about the safety of their children. We will watch this trend as our visits continue over the autumn.

Concerns about what to do when children cannot attend school are very topical as cases spike in some areas. Remote learning presents considerable challenges. Often these are characterised as problems of access – to technology, to broadband or to peace, quiet and space in the home – and these concerns were described on our visits. But there are other challenges too, including how to motivate a child to engage outside of the classroom's structured regime. Parents’ experiences of remote learning will vary, but common to many has been a real struggle get children to turn off the Xbox and pick up the textbook.

It became apparent on our visits that there is a curriculum issue here as well. Schools told us that they had plans to provide remote learning, through technology or printed work, but they said much of the content they could provide remotely was not fully aligned with the classroom curriculum. If we expect many children to find themselves at home in term time once or even more often this year, for possibly a fortnight at a time, they must not lose the progression that a strong, well-sequenced curriculum brings. Without that structure, remote education becomes more about filling time than about effective learning.

It’s good to hear that most schools intend to have a full curriculum back in place by the summer term, if not before. Schools are recognising that the best way to rebuild resilience and support their children’s well-being is to make schooling as normal as possible. That means letting teachers perform their everyday magic and focus on teaching their subjects. And we must not forget the physical toll on children of being largely inactive for a long time. A decline in physical health among pupils was highlighted by many schools, and returning to PE is an important aspect of the return to school.

Of course, some children have more vulnerabilities than others. In our next report, we will look in more detail at the experiences of children with SEND, but we heard from the mainstream and special schools that we visited about the impact of a lack of schooling on these children. In particular, children who do not communicate verbally had seen their communication skills regress while their social contact was more limited.

In spite of the challenges they faced, there were a number of positives to be taken from our visits to children’s homes in September. It’s clear that staff in homes have worked very hard to maintain an environment that is COVID secure, while trying to maintain as much normality as they can for the children. However, our regulatory work through the summer did surface some concerns. You can read more about this work in a blog post by Yvette Stanley, National Director, Social Care.

Where restrictions allowed for it, staff in children’s homes facilitated children’s visits to friends and contact with families – but this was not always possible. Just as many workplaces moved online and team meetings became Teams meetings, technology often contributed to maintaining contact between children and their families and with social workers. We know that the move to online communication has actually helped some young people who might have found direct contact with family members stressful. Online communication has removed some of the anxiety from the process, and this could become a lasting legacy of lockdown in cases when direct personal contact is not in the best interest of the child.

During this period, staff in homes made efforts to entertain children and keep spirits up. Even so, homes reported increased frustrations and anxiety over the summer, leading in some circumstances to greater tensions between children. In general terms, the homes that were well led and maintained consistent boundaries were able to respond well. They reported that relationships between staff and children had improved, as staff helped children understand the changing nature of restrictions and discussed anxieties about the pandemic.

However, homes that were already struggling, either because of a lack of structure, inadequate leadership or staffing vacancies, were put under more strain as a result of COVID-19. We also heard about difficulties liaising with partner agencies or accessing specialist services and we hope this situation will improve – but local restrictions might lead to rather different experiences in different areas.

In every kind of provider that we are visiting, strong leadership and committed staff remain key to making the best of this challenging time. The member of staff at a children’s home who isolated with a child who was displaying COVID-19 symptoms so they did not feel alone stands out. But so does the determination, expressed by many of the school leaders we spoke to, that the pupils currently under their care and guidance must not come to be defined as ‘the COVID generation’. They deserve much more than that.