

MEDIA RELEASE

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PAGB statement on painkillers containing codeine

Responding to comments about codeine made on BBC Radio Jersey in a series exploring the island's relationship with drugs, PAGB Chief Executive, John Smith, said:

“Over-the-counter (OTC) products containing codeine are safe and effective, if used in accordance with the instructions on the pack and patient information leaflet inside.

“We strongly believe that comments made on BBC Radio Jersey comparing codeine to heroin are unhelpful and inappropriate. Despite being an opioid, codeine is weaker than morphine and is used at low doses in OTC products.

“OTC products that contain codeine have been rigorously assessed for safety and efficacy and approved by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

“These products are designed to provide symptomatic relief for people suffering from short term moderate pain that is not alleviated by paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin alone. They carry prominent warnings about the risk of addiction on the front of pack. However, there is only a risk of addiction if the products are used for longer periods or at higher doses than stated on the pack.

“If people adhere to the warnings and instructions on the packs and do not take the product for more than three days, there is no risk of addiction.

“Safety is of paramount importance to the OTC medicines industry. There are a number of measures in place to help ensure the safe use of codeine products. These include:

- Prominent front of pack warnings which clearly state “Can cause addiction. Use for three days only”
- A requirement for all advertising to contain the same warning
- A requirement that advertising for codeine containing products should not emphasise the ‘strength’ or ‘power’ of the product.

“Products containing codeine can only be sold under the supervision of a pharmacist. They are not available on general sale in supermarkets or other retail outlets.

“OTC medicines manufacturers provide comprehensive accessible information to support people to make responsible informed decisions, in discussion with their pharmacist, about which analgesic product is right for them.

“The industry is concerned if anyone misuses any OTC product. A comparatively large number of people use the products as directed and benefit from them compared to the evidence to date about the extent of misuse. PAGB is pleased to see that robust research into codeine use, misuse and dependence has been funded by the EU (the Codemisused Study). We await the results with interest and will respond accordingly to any relevant recommendations when the study is published.”

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Notes to editors:

PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain) is the UK trade association representing manufacturers of branded over-the-counter medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements.

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