



The Consumer Healthcare Association

14th January 2020

PAGB response to BBC Horizon programme on OTC codeine medication

PAGB Chief Executive, John Smith, said: “Products containing codeine are designed to provide symptomatic relief for people suffering from short term moderate pain that is not alleviated by paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin alone.

“Over-the-counter (OTC) products containing codeine are appropriately safe and effective, if used in accordance with the instructions on the pack and patient information leaflet inside. These products can only be sold under the supervision of a pharmacist and carry prominent warnings about the risk of addiction on the front of 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.

“Manufacturers of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines provide comprehensive accessible information to support people to make responsible informed decisions, in discussion with their pharmacist, about which painkiller is right for them.

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

- OTC products containing codeine can only be sold under the supervision of a pharmacist
- Prominent front of pack warnings, which clearly state, “Can cause addiction. Use for three days only.” These on pack warnings are currently being updated to also include “contains opioid”
- 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.

“All consumer advertising for OTC medicines from PAGB member companies is approved by PAGB before it is published or broadcast to ensure it is not misleading and is compliant with relevant regulations.

“Anyone who has concerns about taking a medicine should speak to a pharmacist for advice. Pharmacists are highly trained healthcare professionals and can provide useful information and advice on OTC medicines.”

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Notes to editors:

PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, represents the manufacturers of branded OTC medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements in the UK.

For further information please contact our PR agency Pegasus at pagb@thisispegasus.co.uk or call 01273 712000. For urgent out-of-hours queries, please email or call 07799 781740.