

News story: Government announces that medicinal cannabis is legal

For the first time in the UK, expert doctors have been given the option to legally issue prescriptions for cannabis-based medicines when they agree that their patients could benefit from this treatment.

The law change, laid in Parliament today, came after the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, listened to concerns from parents of children with conditions such as severe epilepsy.

Over the summer he called for an urgent review of cannabis-based medicinal products and accepted recommendations that followed from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) and the UK's Chief Medical Adviser.

The new law will not limit the types of conditions that can be considered for treatment and doctors will no longer need to seek approval from an expert panel in order for patients to access the medicines.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Having been moved by heartbreaking cases involving sick children, it was important to me that we took swift action to help those who can benefit from medicinal cannabis.

We have now delivered on our promise and specialist doctors will have the option to prescribe these products where there is a real need.

I'm grateful to the expert panel – who have been considering cases in the interim – and to those who've worked hard to bring about this change at the earliest possible opportunity.

The decision to prescribe these unlicensed medicines must be made by a specialist doctor – not a GP. These doctors focus on one field of medicine such as neurology or paediatrics and are listed on the General Medical Council's specialist register. They must make decisions on prescribing cannabis-based products for medicinal use on a case-by-case basis, and only when the patient has an unmet special clinical need that cannot be met by licensed products.

Patients under the care of a specialist should discuss their treatment plan with them.

NHS England, the British Paediatric Neurology Association and the Royal College of Physicians will provide clinical advice to doctors ahead of the law change. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has been commissioned to develop more detailed guidelines for clinicians in the longer

term.

President of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Professor Ashok Soni OBE, said:

This news will be welcomed by many patients with serious health conditions.

The prospect of a future where safe and effective licensed cannabis-based medicines can be prescribed to help relieve suffering is genuinely exciting.

We will work with the NHS to help support specialists in making the right prescribing decisions.

The Home Secretary has made it clear that today's announcement does not pave the way towards legalising cannabis for recreational use. The penalties for unauthorised supply and possession will remain unchanged.