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UK Body Calls For 'Clear Guidance' On THC Levels In CBD Oils

by David Ridley

UK's Royal Pharmaceutical Society calls on government to clarify permissible THC levels in CBD oils to avoid pharmacists selling illegal products.

Pharmacists in the UK worried about selling illegal cannabis products need “clear guidance” on tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) levels in cannabidiol (CBD) oils, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society has insisted.

In a letter to the UK home secretary, Sajid Javid, RPS pointed to reports in the media and in the pharmaceutical and medical literature claiming that, to be legal, CBD oils should contain less than 0.2% THC. However, this was a “misinterpretation” of the Home Office’s guidelines, RPS claimed.

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The Home Office document that the RPS letter refers to, “Drug Licensing Factsheet on Cannabis,

CBD and other Cannabinoids,” states that CBD “as an isolated substance, in its pure form” – in other words with no THC content – would not be considered a controlled substance under the UK’s Misuse of Drugs Regulations.

The problem with CBD oil, however, was that it was very difficult to isolate pure CBD, the Home Office noted. Furthermore, many manufacturers “did not fully disclose” the contents of their CBD products or “provide a full spectrum analysis at an appropriate level of sensitivity to accurately and consistently determine their true content or control status.”

“Against this background, the presumption has to be one of caution,” the Home Office recommended, as any CBD oil containing any controlled cannabinoids such as THC, “unintentionally or otherwise,” would “highly likely” be considered a controlled substance under UK law.

Due to the confusion regarding the legal status of THC-containing CBD oils, RPS noted that there was a “further confusion” with regards to the potential legal implications of pharmacists and pharmacy teams handling such products.

“Pharmacists have raised concerns about purchasing supplies of CBD oil that may contain trace amounts of THC and the legal status of such products,” RPS explained.

What was needed, therefore, was “clear guidance” from the Home Office on the permissible content of THC in CBD oils, RPS concluded.

Tests Reveal Trace Levels Of THC

Meanwhile, the UK’s Centre for Medicinal Cannabis revealed through a third-party blind test of 30 CBD oil products currently on the market in the country that almost half (45%) had measurable levels of THC (mean content 0.04%) and were thus “technically illegal.”

Furthermore, eleven of the oils tested had less than 50% of the advertised CBD content, CMC reported, with one CBD oil sold in a high street pharmacy containing 0% CBD yet retailing for £90 (\$110).

The test also found other substances with no therapeutic value contained in the oils. One product contained 3.8% ethanol, CMC continued, and seven contained levels of solvent dichloromethane above food limit safety levels.

“The results are highly revealing and provide a good overview of the true nature of the CBD products being sold in the UK,” CMC commented. “They reveal a wide range in terms of quality, and poor practice in a minority of cases.”

CMC called for the CBD firms to use the results of the survey to understand the areas of weakness in their production processes or, where appropriate, to seek reassurance within their supply chains that these negative results were not reflected in their products.

Echoing RPS' position, CMC also called for the UK government to "clarify, consult, then revise" the relevant laws and regulations concerning CBD products in the country.

Consumers Being "Taken For A Ride"

Writer and investigative journalist Mike Power told HBW Insight that there was no time to lose in creating new and clear regulations for CBD, as consumers were in many cases currently "being taken for a ride."

"The UK CBD industry is unregulated at the moment," he explained. "For a chemical that has so many undoubted medicinal uses, from its role as an anti-inflammatory to its potential for pain relief, that is a great shame and a grave error."

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Considering the "urgent clinical needs" of those in distress that would benefit from use of legitimate CBD products, Power insisted that the UK government had a "moral duty to act urgently."

Government should fund "hundreds" of medical trials into the medicinal uses of CBD and THC "as soon as possible," he suggested, so that in future consumers could be assured that the CBD products they are using are safe and effective.