

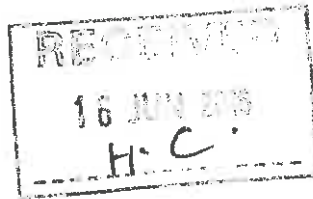


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15 JUN 2016

*Ms Joanne Kearsley*

**INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF CHRISTINE MARIE STEVENSON –  
REGULATION 28 REPORT**

Thank you for your letter of 15 April to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) about the tragic death of Christine Marie Stevenson from the combined toxic effects of a number of prescribed and controlled substances. I am replying as the Minister for Preventing Abuse, Exploitation and Crime, with responsibility for drug policy including the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001.

I note your request for action regarding the prescribing of products such as oramorph, which have a morphine content of less than 0.2%.

As you stated in your report, there were many factors around the prescribing of the amounts of morphine to Ms Stevenson that led to her death and I am grateful to you for raising these issues.

My officials have consulted with other departments and agencies who have responsibility for prescribing opiate medicines for severe pain relief, including the Department of Health and the Care Quality Commission. The amount of morphine needed to give relief from severe pain varies enormously according to the needs of each individual. It is not possible to set a daily maximum dose. If a limit to the amount of oramorph which can be prescribed were set, it may have unintended consequences and could have a negative impact on some patients' care.

All professionals who prescribe any medicines should act within their scope of practice and comply with their Regulators' standards. All prescribers are required to accept clinical and professional responsibility for their prescribing decisions. Following the Shipman Inquiry the governance requirements for the safe management of controlled drugs, including the prescribing, requisitioning, supply and storage of controlled drugs were strengthened and guidance was issued by the Department of Health and the National Prescribing Centre. Most recently NICE published guidance on the safe use and management of controlled drugs in April 2016 (<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG46>).

The response from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency confirms that information from your investigation has been added to the Yellow Card Scheme which is the scheme used to monitor substances suspected of being misused, including low concentrations of morphine in the future.

I also note your point about the missing 300mls of morphine sulphate. The diversion of prescription drugs into the illicit supply is taken very seriously, which is why the Home Secretary has commissioned the ACMD to "*explore the potential for medical and social harms arising from the illicit supply of medicines – predominantly controlled drugs*".

The scope of this work includes:

- whether diversion and illicit supply displaces the misuse of classic drugs;
- the prevalence of misuse of medicines obtained through these means;
- demographics of users; and
- the most prevalent drugs being misused

We expect the ACMD to report their findings this year.

Already a considerable number of prescription-only medicines are controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, where there has been evidence on misuse and harms sufficient to justify additional controls over and above those provided by medicine laws. This includes morphine and tramadol.

I hope that this letter addresses your concerns.



**KAREN BRADLEY MP**