

acceptably safe. Doctors must be confident about the products they prescribe and the MHRA will only grant a marketing authorisation (a licence) for any product once it is satisfied that it is safe, effective and of an acceptable quality for use in the UK. 'Sativex' is a licensed medicinal product authorised for use as add-on treatment, for symptom improvement in patients with moderate to severe spasticity due to multiple sclerosis (MS) who have not responded adequately to other anti-spasticity medication and who demonstrate clinically significant improvement in spasticity related symptoms during an initial trial of therapy.

The MHRA advise that 'Sativex' has been rigorously evaluated in a programme of non-clinical and clinical studies that establish its safety and efficacy in the approved indication. These data have been evaluated by MHRA and independent UK experts and demonstrate that the benefit/risk is positive in this condition. A Public Assessment Report on Sativex Oromucosal Spray providing further information on the assessment process leading to its approval has been published and can be found at <http://www.mhra.gov.uk>. This outlines the specific studies performed by the Marketing Authorisation Holder (GW Pharmaceuticals Ltd) to demonstrate the safety and efficacy of the product as well as the manufacturing controls in place to ensure the quality of the finished product.

The Department of Health confirm that there is currently no alcohol-free form of cannabis-based medicine available in the UK. The composition of 'Sativex' and whether an alcohol free version is available are matters for the manufacturer. We do, however, understand that not all medicines are suitable for everyone's individual requirements. The MHRA advise that Doctors and Pharmacists will usually explain the ingredients contained within medicines before a patient takes it. If a patient has any ethical difficulties in taking a medicine which is not usually sanctioned by their faith, it is advised that they consult a religious figure that should be able to advise accordingly. If a medicine is deemed unsuitable, the patient can consult with their doctor who will be able to prescribe alternative medication which is more suitable to the individual's requirements.

With regards to Mr Walsh's reference to a ban on peppermint in medical preparations within the EU, this substance is not controlled in the UK. Mr Walsh may wish to contact the relevant EU authorities who should be able to provide further information on this product.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Brokenshire', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

James Brokenshire