

3.2 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding whether he would require the Medical Officer of Health to issue an apology and correction following a statement to BBC Radio Jersey in relation to ‘Cannabis: the Evidence of Medical Use’: [1(298)]

Given the contents of *Cannabis: the Evidence for Medical Use* (in particular pages 31 to 33), will the Minister require the Medical Officer of Health to issue an apology and a correction following the Medical Officer’s statement to BBC Radio Jersey on 3rd May 2017 that: “There is no evidence [in the Barnes Report] that smoked cannabis is effective”?

Senator A.K.F. Green (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

No.

3.2.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

It is unfortunate that the Minister gives such a short response in the negative because be under no illusion that the Medical Officer of Health went on the radio and misled the public by stating something which was categorically false, either because she had not read the report and understood it correctly or otherwise. Now this is a very serious matter given the fact that 8.15 in the report, quite early on, states clearly that: “Smoked marijuana, including other forms of it, have all been shown to be efficacious to various extents in a variety of pain settings in good quality studies.” They concluded: “There is good evidence for efficacy of cannabis for pain relief in various formulations and in a number of settings (my emphasis) including smoked marijuana.” So given the fact that it is demonstrable that the Medical Officer of Health has misled the public and circulated an email clarifying to States Members, would she not put on record publicly her correction and her apology?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The Medical Officer of Health is an independent person. She has absolutely nothing to apologise for. In fact, I thank her for her advice and her other professional colleagues that have provided through the Misuse of Drugs Advisory Council, that advice has enabled me to propose removing the legal barrier currently preventing the medicinal use of cannabis. As a fully qualified specialist in public health medicine, she is entitled, and in fact I think required, to express her own independent review. I would not expect otherwise. It is very convenient to quote parts of the Barnes Report, however in the conclusion it stated that medical recommendation would be that cannabis should not be taken as a smoked product.

3.2.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Of course no current Medical Officer is going to suggest that it is smoked. But that is not what she said. While she might be entitled to her own views she is not entitled to her own facts. The fact is that the report said there was clear evidence that smoked marijuana is effective in a variety of settings for pain relief and it cited 4 good quality studies. Yet, she went on the radio publicly, in the name of the Minister, to say that there was no evidence in the Barnes Report that it was effective. It is categorically untrue. This is not a political issue. It is a matter of fact which she needs to correct publicly. She stated incorrectly publicly one thing and she should be going on record to state and clear up that misapprehension. Is that not simple in the mind of the Minister?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The simple matter is that the Medical Officer of Health has a professional view. She equates it to mean it would be just like ... there are only 5 studies not 4. Five very small studies on smoking and the evidence of the effectiveness of this was very clearly explained and summarised in the end report. The reason there is so little scientific evidence about the

effectiveness of smoked cannabis is because among 20,000 references reviewed by the Barnes Report... is because it is considered unethical to do trials where people are required to consume a substance that is recognised as harmful, that is the smoke, which is known to be carcinogenic. It would be just like doing trials of alcohol consumption and saying: "Well, it made their pain improve" as well it might have done, albeit while they were intoxicated. But that would not be good grounds for doctors to start recommending alcohol as a safe and acceptable treatment for pain control.

3.2.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The issue here is not the legalisation of cannabis or otherwise. It is the quote taken from expert advice, taken out of place and wrongly. So the Barnes Report states clearly: "We conclude that there is good evidence for efficacy of cannabis for pain relief in various formulations and in a number of settings." Good evidence. Yet our own officer denies this. Will the Minister then point out and remind Members of the public that this evidence exists and will he publicise the findings of the Barnes Report?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The Barnes Report is available to anybody that wants to go online and click on that particular report. But it is very convenient, is it not, to score points against an officer that cannot stand up for themselves? They always conveniently forget the end of the recommendations. The medical recommendation would be that cannabis should not be taken as a smoked product. I do not think it could be clearer than that.

3.2.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The question was to the Minister and not to the officer. Will the Minister take responsibility for spreading the word that there is good evidence of pain relief through cannabis?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

There is good evidence of pain relief through cannabis, that is why we are considering bringing products forward. But it does say in the Barnes Report it should not be taken as a smoked product.

3.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister accept that smoked marijuana, as stated by the Barnes Report, says that there is good quality studies and evidence that smoked marijuana does provide effective pain relief? Yes or no.

Senator A.K.F. Green:

What I accept is the conclusion in the report, looked as a whole, is that the recommendation will be that cannabis should not be taken as a smoked product and that is because of the known carcinogenic effects.