

National Assembly for Wales

Health and Social Care Committee

Inquiry into new psychoactive substances (“legal highs”)

Evidence from Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board – LH 14



SUBMISSION TO THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE ENQUIRY INTO NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (“LEGAL HIGHS”)

Western Bay Area Planning Board response to the Welsh Government request for consultation and oral evidence for the Inquiry into new psychoactive substances ("legal highs"):

The Western Bay Area Planning Board welcomes the terms of reference for this consultation, which are apposite.

There is a marked lack of awareness amongst universal partners with regard to new and emerging psychoactive substances. There is a dearth of national or international research regarding the prevalence of use, effects and risks.

Tier 2 agencies are well placed to raise awareness of these substances and can also provide a pivotal link between substance users, the public and the police. It is unlikely that tier 3 services will have a greater proportion of the contact with users of legal highs, given that the majority of clients accessing tier 3 services will require a level of substitute prescribing for dependence or amelioration of withdrawal from dependence. However, it is likely that partners in wider adult mental health services will see clients with the associated features of substance use and mental ill health e.g. concurrent mental health issues and mephedrone use.

Locally, there has been an increase in requests at NSP outlets for paraphernalia for mephedrone use. Whilst national data suggests a reduction in alcohol consumption by children and young people, there is an anticipated exponential increase in young people using the new and emerging novel substances.

What is not feasible is the suggested role of agencies in submitting substance for testing. Agencies often do not have the capacity to gather substances from clients or to submit them for testing. Health service providers would not be encouraging staff to accept unknown substances from clients.

The police are an integral partner in tackling this issue. Whilst an increased presence in terms of 'stop and search' may assist in raising awareness of these substances, there may also be a risk of criminalising individuals, often young people.

Work with parents to be able to knowledgeably converse with and direct their children's choices with regard to alcohol has been neglected. If we are to remedy this, in addition to the new and emerging novel substances issue there needs to be national research as to the most effective way of engaging parents and young people in this debate. Additionally the information in the substance misuse component of the 'Healthy Schools' programme will require review and refresh, an exercise that we will be undertaking locally in line with our commissioning priorities.

There needs to be action and legislation to address the promotion of the use of psychoactive drugs. Web sites such as <http://www.iceheadshop.co.uk/> make it woefully simple for people to purchase substances. Clearly this cannot be covered by a generic ban on advertising the sale of psychoactive substances and a more creative legislative solution is required. The response of making new and emerging substances illegal will lead to further and continued attempts to circumvent the prohibition. There should be an open debate regarding the decriminalisation of substance use to enable an ongoing dialogue regarding individual's substance use and methods of reducing harm.

One of the most concerning aspects of new and emerging psychoactive drugs are the lack of information with regard to the content of each substance and the 'time lag' in analysis. The potential effects are therefore often unknown or not fully realised by users.

There need to be strong national links to, and collaboration with the EMCDDA hosted EU early warning system, with clear routes of disseminating emerging information to local partnerships and substance users.

The WEDINOS system of reporting would appear to be unsustainable. The language used on the WEDINOS site is not user friendly and it demand for analysis of substance appears that the demand of substance analysis has overwhelmed the service.