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Select Committee on Science and Technology Report

HOUSE of LORDS

PRESS INFORMATION

EMBARGO 0001 HOURS
 WEDNESDAY 11th NOVEMBER 1998

LORDS SAY, LEGALISE CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL USE

The Government should allow doctors to prescribe cannabis for medical use: this is the conclusion of a report by the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, published today.

Lord Perry of Walton, chairman of the inquiry said: "We have seen enough evidence to convince us that a doctor might legitimately want to prescribe cannabis to relieve pain, or the symptoms of multiple sclerosis (MS), and that the criminal law ought not to stand in the way. Far from being a step towards general legalisation, our recommendation would make the ban on recreational use easier to enforce. Above all, it would show compassion to patients who currently risk prosecution to get help."

MEDICAL USE

Cannabis is a "Schedule 1" drug, and cannot be used at all in medicine, except for research under special Home Office licence. **The Lords recommend that it should be moved to "Schedule 2"**. This would allow doctors to prescribe it, subject to certain special regulations, and it would allow doctors and pharmacists to supply it in accordance with a prescription.

The report sets out evidence that cannabis can be effective in some patients to relieve the symptoms of MS, and against certain forms of pain. The Lords say, this evidence is enough to justify a change in the law. They are less convinced about its effectiveness in other conditions, including epilepsy, glaucoma and asthma.

The Lords welcome the fact that clinical trials of cannabis are currently being launched, by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, and by Dr Geoffrey Guy of GW Pharmaceuticals, with a view to the eventual licensing of cannabis as a medicine. The Lords say, however, that cannabis should be rescheduled now, rather than waiting several years for the results of these trials.

If cannabis ever becomes a licensed medicine, the Lords do not envisage it being licensed for smoking; they call for research into alternative delivery systems.

At present, people who use cannabis for medical reasons risk prosecution; and juries sometimes refuse to convict such people, which brings the law into disrepute. If prescription were legalised, then someone using cannabis for medical reasons who was accused of recreational use could clear himself at once by producing the prescription. [\[More\]](#)

RECREATIONAL USE

The Lords find enough evidence of toxic effects of cannabis to justify maintaining the present ban on recreational use. Besides being intoxicating, they report that:

- regular heavy use can lead to psychological dependence, and even in some cases to physical dependence, involving withdrawal symptoms;
- cannabis can pose a risk to people with a heart condition;
- cannabis can exacerbate pre-existing mental illness;
- smoking cannabis is as bad for the lungs as smoking tobacco, and may cause cancer.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The report follows an inquiry which began in April, and included 12 public hearings. A list of the Lords who took part in the study is attached :
2. The report is published by The Stationery Office: *Cannabis*, HL Paper 151, ISBN 0 10 4151986, £9.50.
3. The evidence taken by the Committee is published separately as HL Paper 151-I, ISBN 0 10 4792981, £22.60.
4. The full text will be on the Internet on publication, accessible via the UK Parliament home page at www.parliament.uk
4. The Government are required to respond in writing to the report; and the report will be debated in the House of Lords.

House of Lords Committee Office

'Phone 0171-219 6075; Fax 0171-219 4931 [Ends]

CHAIRMAN

Lord Perry of Walton FRS (Lib Dem): former Professor of Pharmacology; founding Vice-Chancellor of the Open University 1969-81.

MEMBERS

Lord Butterfield (Cons): Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham University 1970-75; Regius Professor of Physic (ie medicine), Cambridge, 1975-87; Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University 1983-85.

Lord Butterworth (Cons): Vice-Chancellor of the University of Warwick 1963-85.

Lord Carmichael of Kelvingrove (Lab): MP 1962-83; former junior Minister in various departments.

Lord Dixon-Smith (Cons): former Chairman, Association of County Councils.

Lord Kirkwood (Lib Dem): metallurgist; former lecturer, Sheffield University.

Lord Nathan (cross-bench): solicitor; former member of Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution.

Lord Porter of Luddenham (cross-bench): Nobel Prize for Chemistry 1967; President of the Royal Society 1985-90.

Lord Rea (Lab): former GP.

Lord Soulsby of Swaffham Prior (Cons): Emeritus Professor of Animal Pathology, Cambridge; President of the Royal Society of Medicine.

Lord Walton of Detchant (cross-bench): former professor of Neurology and Dean of Medicine, Newcastle University; former President of the General Medical Council, the British Medical Association, and the World Federation of Neurology.

Lord Winston (Lab): Dean of the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

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