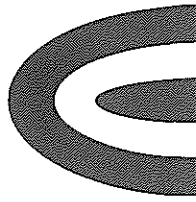


12 NOV 2014



MEDSAFE

NEW ZEALAND MEDICINES
AND MEDICAL DEVICES
SAFETY AUTHORITY

A BUSINESS UNIT OF
THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

www.medsafe.govt.nz

Thomas Pietkiewicz
fyi-request-2133-eb2072e5@requests.fyi.org.nz

H201403828

Dear Mr Pietkiewicz

Re: Official Information Request

Thank you for your request for official information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). You have requested all the information held by the Ministry of Health regarding cannabis / marijuana as a cure for different types of cancers and positively helping medical conditions.

Your request is very broad and would typically be refused under section 18(f) of the Act because the information requested cannot be made available without substantial research and collation. However, to provide you with a more considered response I have decided to interpret your request as requiring any scientific or technical reports held by the Ministry of Health regarding the therapeutic benefits of cannabis leaf.

Leaf cannabis / marijuana promoted as preventing, treating or curing diseases or medical conditions is considered to be a medicine in New Zealand. Companies wishing to supply medicines must comply with the requirements of the Medicines Act 1981.

This means that, except in a few specific circumstances, medicines must be approved by the Minister of Health before they can be distributed. Similarly, clinical trials must be approved before they can be conducted in New Zealand. Medsafe (a business unit within the Ministry of Health) is responsible for reviewing the safety, efficacy and quality data for medicines prior to approval and for administering the clinical trial approval process.

Medsafe has not received any applications to use leaf cannabis / marijuana as a cure for cancer or to use in the treatment of any other disease or medical condition. Therefore Medsafe does not hold any scientific or technical reports on the benefits of leaf cannabis and I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(e) of the Act because the information you are seeking is not held by the Ministry of Health.

If I have not interpreted your request correctly you may submit a new request to the Ministry of Health. However, please provide more detail regarding your request, particularly what type of documents you are seeking and also what time frame you are interested in.

You may be interested to know that there is an approved medicine which contains an extract of cannabis available for use in New Zealand. The medicine is called Sativex and is indicated for the improvement of symptoms associated with multiple sclerosis. You can read about Sativex on the Medsafe website using the product search function at <http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/regulatory/DbSearch.asp> or the data sheet search function at <http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/datasheet/DSForm.asp>.

The application for approval of Sativex contains some scientific studies about the risks and benefits of Sativex. I have decided not to provide these studies at this time because I do not consider that your request pertains to the use of Sativex.

If my assumption is incorrect you may submit a new request for information held by Medsafe relating to the Sativex application. Please note however, some information may be considered confidential to the applicant and may not be able to be released.

You may also be aware that Parliament has considered the medicinal use of cannabis, most recently as a result of a petition from William Rea. In May 2014 a report was released by the Health Select Committee and is available on the Parliamentary website http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/pb/presented/petitions/50DBHOH_PET3133_1/petition-of-william-joseph-rea-requesting-that-the-house.

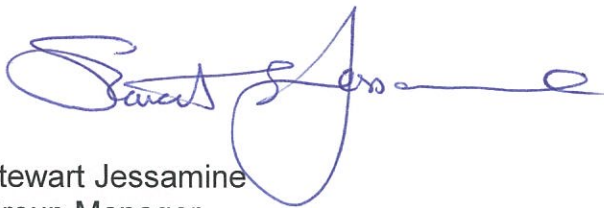
You have also requested all the statistics held by the Ministry of Health for hospital admissions relating to cannabis / marijuana consumption and for alcohol consumption.

Please find attached a summary of admissions to publicly funded hospitals between the years 2000 and 2013, where alcohol or cannabis was cited in the primary diagnosis. Please note that people who have multiple hospitalisations (eg, transfers, readmissions, multiple incidents) are counted multiple times.

If you have any queries about this data, please direct them to Analytical Services, Ministry of Health. They can be contacted by phone on (04) 496-2000, fax on (04) 816-2898 or by e-mail (data-enquiries@moh.govt.nz).

You have the right to complain to the Ombudsman about my response to your request. Information about making a complaint is on the website of the Office of the Ombudsman (www.ombudsman.parliament.nz). You can also contact the Office on Freephone 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stewart Jessamine', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stewart Jessamine
Group Manager
Medsafe

Diagnosis	Number of hospital admissions per year													
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Mental and behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol	2318	1935	1890	2021	1983	1434	1440	1519	1608	1654	1787	1892	1905	2001
Mental and behavioural disorders due to use of cannabinoids	320	245	261	255	239	195	164	153	130	133	172	141	198	254
Toxic effect of cannabis (derivatives)	31	22	19	28	13	22	19	12	21	12	24	23	19	22
Toxic effect of alcohol	135	118	108	69	80	85	107	85	73	81	98	81	90	75