

DrugScope response to Daily Telegraph front-page cannabis story, Friday 11 January

12 January 2008

On Friday 11 January the Daily Telegraph published a front-page news article under the headline: *Abuse of cannabis puts 500 a week in hospital*. You can read the full story by following the link at the end of this article.

The Daily Telegraph piece referred to National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) figures cited by Minister of State for Public Health, Dawn Primarolo, in a response to a Parliamentary Question about the numbers of people treated for cannabis.

DrugScope sent a letter on Friday 11 January to the Daily Telegraph in response to this story; as yet they have declined to publish it. Our response is reproduced below.

Dear Sir,

The front-page headline on Friday's Daily Telegraph (Abuse of cannabis puts 500 a week in hospital, 11/01/08) misrepresents figures given by Dawn Primarolo, Minister of State for Public Health, in her response to a Parliamentary Question this week.

We have ascertained that the figures supplied by the Minister do not relate to actual hospital admissions; the source of the figures, the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) does not collect data on hospital admissions and this was evident in the Minister's response.

The figures instead relate to those who have come forward to community-based drug treatment services seeking some form of help, advice or treatment relating to their use of cannabis. DrugScope understands that even if treatment consists of no more than an informal chat with a drug worker, this would still have been recorded in the statistics quoted by the Minister.

Some of those clients may of course have gone on to receive treatment in hospital for conditions relating to their use of cannabis. However, figures provided to DrugScope by the Department of Health reveal that rather than 500 hospital admissions a week, the figure was nearer 14 per week (in 2006/07) for individuals with a primary diagnosis of mental health problems due to the use of cannabis. This is 14 admissions too many, but still way below the figure quoted by your correspondent.

In addition, the number of hospital admissions in 2006/07 with this diagnosis (750) was lower than in 2005/06 (946) - and it should be noted that the same individual could have been admitted to hospital more than once in any one year.

The public do need to be aware of the potential risks related to cannabis; it is not a harmless drug. But public information about the drug must be based on sound data and where that data exists, the media has a responsibility to be scrupulous in its presentation.

Yours,

Martin Barnes

*Chief executive,
DrugScope SE1*

For more information please contact Ruth Goldsmith in the DrugScope Press Office on 020 7940 7517 (07736 895563 out of hours) or at press@drugscope.org.uk

Related Links

[Daily Telegraph Abuse of cannabis puts 500 a week in hospital \(opens in new window\)](#)