

**AP272**

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## **NEW BILL TAKES UP CALLS FOR WARNING SYMBOLS ON MEDICATION**

A bill supporting safety lawyers' calls for high-visibility warning symbols on medicines which can dangerously impair judgement will be introduced in the House of Commons tomorrow (February 1).

The Pharmaceutical Labelling (Warning of Cognitive Function Impairment) Bill, to be introduced by Labour MP Andrew Dismore, follows calls from the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) for a red triangle symbol on 'psychoactive' medicines (which directly affect the brain) to warn people who use them that they can have the same impact on their judgement as taking alcohol.

"We fully support this bill, as part of our drive for a new safety culture in this country, because most people are completely unaware of the hidden dangers of some commonly-used medicines and may remain unaware until their impaired judgement has caused a serious injury, or worse," said APIL president, Colin Ettinger.

"Sensible people would not think of driving a car or going to work if they were under the influence of alcohol, but they can be taking prescription or over-the-counter medicines without realising they can have similar effects.

"These drugs in themselves are not dangerous," he went on. "But if someone is taking them while operating machinery or driving a car, for example, the combined effect can be disastrous and people must be fully aware of this so other medical options can be discussed with a doctor or pharmacist."

Ettinger explained that vague warnings about drowsiness are not enough. "Some medications can distort a patient's perception of time," he said. "Others can make the patient's reactions quicker, but less accurate.

"Many workplaces have an alcohol policy, and turn away employees who go to work when drunk. Many have screening to detect the use of illicit drugs. But most people have no idea that prescription or over-the-counter medicines can be just as dangerous.

"People must be made to understand that some medicines are simply incompatible with the jobs they do – and it is also crucial that employers are alert to the problem so they can take steps to protect employees from needless injury."

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**Notes to editors:** \* The Pharmaceutical Labelling (Warning of Cognitive Function Impairment) Bill will be introduced under the ten-minute rule bill procedure at 12.30 on 1 February.

The long title of the bill is 'A bill to make provision for a warning symbol to be prominently displayed on the packaging of pharmaceuticals which act on the brain and central nervous system so as to impair dangerously the consumer's ability to carry out certain activities; and for connected purposes'.

APIL has campaigned for a red triangle warning symbol to be prominently displayed on certain medicines as part of a drive to promote the need for a safety culture to prevent avoidable deaths and injuries. This is the subject of Early Day Motion 300, signed by 35 MPs to date, the text of which follows:

***That this House believes that if safety were to be taken seriously by those making decisions which affect others, there would be fewer avoidable injuries; notes that quite aside from the human cost of workplace injury, the most up-to-date figures show that the financial cost was between £13 billion and £22 billion in 2001-02; welcomes the safety culture campaign launched by the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers to ensure that consumers, employers and employees are aware of the importance of safety; and calls on the Government to take further steps to ensure that safety is at the top of its agenda.***

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