

Sean Cardinaal
Chief Operating Officer – Pepco Group

By email

December 2020

Dear Mr Cardinaal,

RE: Sale of multiple packs of paracetamol by Poundland

It has been brought to our attention that Poundland are selling multiple boxes of paracetamol for £1 and offering a buy two get-one-free deal. As President of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society I have serious concerns about the irresponsible way that these painkillers are being promoted and sold at your stores.

Whilst Poundland has not broken the law governing the sale of these painkillers, the decision to offer your customers this deal contravenes the guidance issued by the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA) on best practice for the sale of medicines for pain relief. The guidance clearly states that no more than two packs should be supplied at any one time and that promotional offers that encourage the sale of more than one pack should not be used. This MHRA guidance was endorsed by the British Retail Consortium, an association we note you are a member of.

As the professional body for pharmacy and pharmacists in Great Britain, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society believes that medicines should not be treated like other consumer products. All medicines are potentially dangerous and retailers who sell medicines have a responsibility to ensure they are sold appropriately.

Paracetamol is a medicine which needs to be treated with particular caution precisely because it is so easy to overdose. Harm from paracetamol poisoning often does not cause any symptoms until it is too late to avoid liver damage, and for some people, subsequent death. It was in reaction to the high levels of death caused by this medicine that the MHRA issued guidance on its sale.

Research carried out by The Centre for Suicide Research at Oxford University has reported that since the 1998 Medicines for Human Use Regulations restricted the pack sizes of paracetamol, there has been “a beneficial effect in terms of reduced sizes of overdoses and numbers of deaths and liver transplantations.” (<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/11/460>) Reducing quantities of paracetamol in the home sufficient to cause harm is key to reducing overdoses.

I hope that you will reconsider your company’s position on this matter and that you will in future be complying with the guidance issued by the MHRA on the sale of painkillers. I look forward to receiving your response to this letter.

Yours Sincerely



Sandra Gidley FRPharmS
President, Royal Pharmaceutical Society



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