

Austin Cooke  
Managing Director  
Poundland

*By email*

1 November 2023

Dear Mr Cooke,

**RE: Promotional sale of multiple packs of paracetamol**

It has been brought to our attention that Poundland stores are running a promotional offer for customers to purchase three paracetamol packs of 16 tablets for £1. This contravenes guidance issued by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) on best practice for the sale of medicines for pain relief. This guidance was endorsed by the British Retail Consortium, an association of which you are a member.

The Blue Guide: Advertising and Promotion of Medicines in the UK<sup>i</sup> is published by the MHRA and Appendix 4 specifies:

- Do not sell more than two packs in any one transaction.
- Do not use offers that encourage the sale of more than one pack.

Medicines for pain relief on general sale are effective and acceptably safe when used according to the label instructions. But there is evidence to show that people sometimes use large quantities of these medicines impulsively. Restricting the availability of pain relief medicines for purchase is effective in reducing the number of hospital admissions and deaths from accidental or impulsive overdose.

**We have written to you on multiple occasions in 2012, 2016 and 2020 to bring this to your attention and ask you to act now to withdraw this promotion.**

As the professional body for pharmacists and pharmacy 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.

The Government's suicide prevention strategy in England commits to reducing access to common methods of suicide, including painkillers such as paracetamol.<sup>ii</sup> The MHRA is responsible for monitoring compliance with guidance on the sales of painkillers, including



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promotions that exceed the recommended maximum. We will share a copy of this letter with the MHRA for information.

I would urge you to reconsider your company's position on this matter and observe the MHRA guidance which is intended to save lives. I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Claire Anderson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Prof Claire Anderson  
President  
Royal Pharmaceutical Society

Cc: Minister for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy, DHSC  
Chief Executive, MHRA

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<sup>i</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6012d7f2d3bf7f05b92f6cfc/BG\\_2020\\_Brexit\\_Final\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6012d7f2d3bf7f05b92f6cfc/BG_2020_Brexit_Final_version.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england-2023-to-2028/suicide-prevention-in-england-5-year-cross-sector-strategy>