

Cannabis-linked hospital admissions rise

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Mental health hospital admissions due to cannabis have risen by 85 per cent over the last ten years.

Statistics obtained by shadow health secretary Andrew Lansley revealed there had been a 63 per cent increase over the last five years. He obtained the figures from Health Minister Rosie Winterton in a written Commons answer.

They showed that, in 1996/97, there were 510 admissions, rising to 946 in 2005/06.

In 1997/98, there were 506 admissions, 625 in 1998/99, 600 in 1999/2000, 581 in 2000/01, 674 in 2001/02 and 890 in 2003/04. In 2004/05, there were 869 admissions.

Admissions are not the same as the number of patients, as one patient may be admitted more than once in a year.

Mr Lansley said: "Awareness of the link between mental illness and cannabis has increased over recent years, as has the strength of the drug."

He continued: "Both these factors have contributed to the sharp increase of hospital admissions on mental health grounds. That's why the Conservatives have opposed the downgrading of cannabis and pledged to have it reclassified."

At present, cannabis is a class C drug but there have been calls to move it back to class B.

A Department of Health spokesperson said: "Our message is clear - cannabis is harmful, is an illegal drug and should not be taken.

"Our policy on cannabis is in line with the Drugs Strategy, with emphasis on enforcement, prevention, education, and treatment; evidence shows that cannabis use is falling across all age ranges."

Marjorie Wallace, chief executive of the mental health charity Sane, said: "Sane has been saying for years that there is a link between psychosis and cannabis, particularly in its more potent forms, so this increase in hospital admissions comes as no surprise.

"Psychiatrists have been telling us that 80 per cent of patients admitted with their first episode of psychosis have been taking the drug.

"We strongly urge the Government to heed the growing evidence and take urgent action to warn young people that some of them are risking lifelong mental illness - that they are playing Russian roulette with their minds."

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