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[The health of the NHS](#)

Medicinal cannabis is about compassion: sick people should not suffer in silence

Frank Field MP and Baroness Meacher

Estimates put the number of people in the UK taking cannabis for medical reasons at around one million. This week, the campaign for a change in the law to allow doctors to prescribe cannabis and have it dispensed from pharmacies steps up a gear with the launch of a major lobbying drive.

Many politicians will be shocked by the one million figure. But we believe they will also be encouraged by both the quality of the evidence and the range of conditions that cannabis can help with.

The evidence has been strong enough to persuade Germany, Spain, Italy, Australia, the Netherlands, Canada, Israel, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Portugal, and 24 US states plus Washington DC to legalise access. Yet the UK government bizarrely persists in claiming that cannabis has 'no medical benefit'.

This flies in the face of strong evidence from clinical studies showing that it helps with chronic pain, neuropathic pain, spasticity in various neurological conditions, including multiple sclerosis, nausea and vomiting related to chemotherapy and loss of appetite, especially in HIV/AIDS. There is also evidence that it helps with Crohn's disease, fibromyalgia, Epilepsy, Tourette's syndrome and some aspects of Parkinson's disease.

Many of the estimated one million medical users in this country are people who find that conventional treatments alone are ineffective in alleviating pain and discomfort, or carry unbearable side effects. Cannabis simply works for them.

But because access to cannabis in the UK is illegal, many among this group are having to face the choice of breaking the law or living in pain. The www.endourpain.org campaign believes they should be free to act as patients and not be criminalised.

Fearing the knock on the door from the police is the last thing that people coping with seriously debilitating conditions such as MS and Crohn's need. The lack of access to medical cannabis is causing real suffering to those that are already suffering enough.

Penny typifies the issue. She has secondary progressive MS. In the mornings, her muscle spasms are so severe that she can hardly speak. Vaping cannabis eases her symptoms and allows her to speak for several hours. It gives her back her quality of life. But to access the cannabis she has to go to the criminal underworld rather than her doctor. Other patients are forced to rent apartments in Holland so that they can register with a Dutch GP to get the cannabis prescribed. This piles extra stress and costs on the sick.

How can we justify a situation where someone with an identical condition on the continent has access to high-quality, prescription medicine, yet on the other side of the English Channel the same person would be expected to suffer in silence?

The issue of medical cannabis is separate from the wider issues of drug law reform. It is simply a question of compassion for people who are sick. [We need to act now.](#)

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