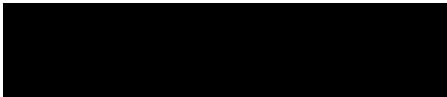




Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Nadine Dorries MP
Minister of State for Patient Safety,
Suicide Prevention and Mental Health*

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU



Ms Caroline Topping
HM Assistant Coroner, County of Surrey
HM Coroner's Court
Station Approach
Woking
GU22 7AP

27 May 2021

Dear Ms Topping

Thank you for your letter of 13 April 2021 about the death of Natasha Crabb. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for mental health services.

Firstly, I would like to say how deeply saddened I was to read of the troubling circumstances surrounding Ms Crabb's death and I offer my deepest condolences to her family and loved ones.

Butane is a highly flammable, colourless, odourless gas. It is a hydrocarbon, found in household and industrial products and is potentially intoxicating if deliberately inhaled. Butane is commonly misused by being inhaled directly through the mouth either from cigarette lighter refills, canisters or aerosol sprays. Butane is a depressant which means it slows down brain and body responses and produces a similar effect to alcohol intoxication. The effect is short-lived, so chronic users will continue inhaling to prolong the effect.

Information about the dangers of inhaling butane is available on the Government's drug information and advice website, Talk to FRANK, available at talktofrank.com. The website includes a confidential helpline which can offer support for those using glues, gases and aerosols and give details of specialist organisations that can help. Local drug services are also be able to direct people to sources of support.

Departmental officials have made contact with the Home Office, which will be providing a response to you in relation to the powers applicable under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016.

I am advised that it is an offence under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 to supply, possess with intent to supply, and offer to supply, a psychoactive substance, such as butane, to a person for its psychoactive effect where a person knows or is reckless as to whether it will be used for its psychoactive effect. The 2016 Act also makes it an offence to produce, import or export a psychoactive substance, for its psychoactive effect. In all these cases, there is a maximum sentence of seven years' imprisonment.

In relation to the wider context of your report, you may be interested to note that NHS England and NHS Improvement have developed their care after custody service, RECONNECT¹, to engage and support more people after their release from custody.

RECONNECT will work pre and post release to reconnect patients to community-based health services to ensure they maintain and continue to improve their health. It will give support at a period of transition and change. The NHS Long Term Plan made a commitment to funding the RECONNECT service². The funding has been agreed at £20million annually by year five (2023/24) of the roll out of the service.

On 20 January 2021, the Government announced a new investment of £148million to cut crime and protect people from the scourge of illegal drugs. As part of this package, £2.5million will be invested in piloting an enhanced RECONNECT service in several areas of the country.

This will support offenders with the most complex needs to engage with and get the right treatment from mental health, substance misuse and other services, for up to a year after release. Offenders will be supported by expert care navigators working with health and probation services. The enhanced service will target 18 to 24-year-olds.

I would also like to take this opportunity to explain the work underway to improve mental health support for people with severe mental illness.

This Government is committed to expanding and transforming mental health services and we recognise that providing the right interventions at the right time is vital to improving outcomes for people with mental health issues.

Under the NHS Long Term Plan, we remain committed to investing at least £2.3billion of extra funding a year in mental health services by 2023/24. New and integrated models of primary and community mental health care, backed by almost £1billion extra by 2023/24, will give 370,000 adults with severe mental illnesses, including adults with a personality disorder, greater choice and control over their care and support them to live well in their communities. In addition, the NHS has committed to ensure that 60 per cent of people with severe mental illness receive a comprehensive physical health-check and follow up, as part of the NHS Long Term Plan.

¹ [NHS England » RECONNECT – Care After Custody](#)

² [NHS Long Term Plan » Health and the justice system](#)

For those with severe needs or in crisis, all NHS mental health providers have established 24/7 mental health crisis lines.

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'ND', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

NADINE DORRIES

**MINISTER OF STATE FOR PATIENT SAFETY, SUICIDE PREVENTION
AND MENTAL HEALTH**