



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*From Rt. Hon Andrew Stephenson CBE MP  
Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care*

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[REDACTED]  
Ian Potter  
Assistant coroner  
Coroner area of Inner North London

[REDACTED]  
25 March 2024

Dear Ian,

Thank you for your correspondence of 21 December to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about the death of Dr Kimberley Anna Liu. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for medicines and medicines regulation. I am thankful for the extended time provided to the Department to provide a response following a transfer from the Department of Culture Media and Sports and the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology.

Firstly, I would like to say how deeply saddened I was to read of the tragic circumstances of Mrs Liu's death, and I offer my sincere condolences to her family and loved ones. The report raises some very important concerns around unregulated websites selling prescription only drugs, appearing to exploit already vulnerable individuals and could also be seen to equip people with the means to complete suicide.

I am aware of the efforts undertaken by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to address the illegal sale and supply of prescription medications, which is an Executive Agency of the Department.

The MHRA is the UK regulator for human medicines and is responsible for enforcing the Human Medicines Regulations 2012. The MHRA has identified the illegal sale and supply of human medicines as a global challenge. This includes the sale of prescription drugs from unregulated sources. Criminal gangs, often based overseas, advertise medicines through illicit websites resembling those of legitimate pharmacies, while others exploit online marketplaces or sell social media platforms.

The MHRA has a dedicated Criminal Enforcement Unit (CEU) that works with partners across government and policing to prevent and disrupt this illegal trade and to bring to justice those involved. The CEU monitors online channels for evidence of illegal activity and takes proportionate regulatory action. This includes using the full range of the Agency's powers to investigate and prosecute offenders where necessary and appropriate. The unit also works to remove illegally trading websites and remove criminal profits from offenders. Through its #Fakemedics communications campaign the MHRA also provides quick and easy tools to help the public avoid buying illegally traded medicines when they shop online.

Following our enquiries with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, my officials inform me that under the Online Safety Act 2023 all in-scope services such as user-to-user platforms and Search services will have new duties to prevent users being harmed by illegal content that they encounter via their services. User-to-user platforms will also need

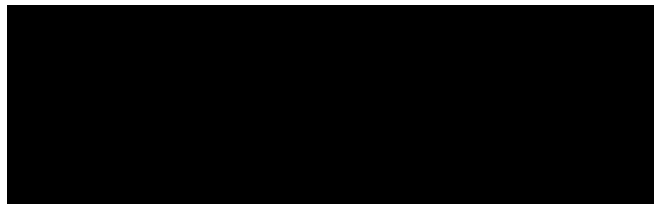
to take steps to reduce risks that their services are used to perpetrate offences. These duties extend to the unlawful supply, or offer to supply, of controlled drugs. Platforms and Search services will need to take steps to prevent users encountering illegal sale of drugs content via their services. Platforms will need to remove this content when it does appear. You may wish to contact the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology for more detailed information regarding how the Online Safety Act will address illegal and harmful self-harm and suicide content.

I would like to assure you that the Government remains concerned about the prevalence of suicide and self-harm content online and there are multiple actions in place to reduce and restrict access to such websites. The Department has taken a lead role in an emerging method working group, which brings together a range of government departments, public sector agencies academics and voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations to identify and tackle emerging methods of suicide.

With respect to your concerns around websites which could be seen to equip people with the means to complete suicide. The suicide prevention strategy for England, published on 11 September 2023, identifies promoting online safety and tackling methods of suicide as priority areas for action. We have also launched a national near real time suspected suicide surveillance system in November 2023 to improve the timely reporting and action to prevent suicides. This will support the rollout of a new national alert system to notify schools, universities, and charities of emerging methods of suicide and risks.

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

Yours sincerely,



Rt. Hon Andrew Stephenson CBE MP  
**Minister of State Health and Secondary Care**