

Dr Polly Taylor
European Veterinary Specialist in Anaesthesia

Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

28th March 2010

Dear Secretary of State

I am writing to resign my position as independent scientific adviser on the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs.

When you met the ACMD in November 2009, many of us expressed our grave concern about the way that our advice had been treated by you and your predecessor, culminating in the dismissal of our chairman, Professor David Nutt. Professor Nutt was dismissed for the content of a lecture he gave in his academic role and which reiterated the advice that the ACMD had given on the appropriate classification of cannabis and ecstasy, advice which the Government had rejected. Two of our members, Dr Les King and Marian Walker, resigned in protest.

At that meeting, you were unable to give the necessary assurances about how independent scientific advice would be treated in future and three further members, Dr Simon Campbell, Dr John Marsden and Dr Ian Ragan resigned. Others of us on the ACMD agreed to wait for the Government's response to the principles for the treatment of scientific advice, which had been drawn up by the scientific community and endorsed by several ACMD members.

The Government's first response, published in December, was highly unsatisfactory and appeared to justify ministers appointing and dismissing independent scientific advisers according to 'trust' which is an arbitrary and subjective matter. We had understood that the requirement of us, as advisers, was to comply with the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees, and not to maintain the favour or trust of a minister with our advice and its communication. Senior scientists and advisers set out these objections in detail, as did the ACMD's submission to the Government's consultation on that document. The same points were made by the Science and Technology Select Committee in their letters to the Government.

I am therefore surprised and dismayed that the Government has rejected these concerns in the publication this week of a final version of the principles, the first of which is a requirement for "mutual trust" backed up by sanctions against independent advisers irrespective of whether the code of practice has been complied with. I feel that there is little more we can do to describe the importance of ensuring that advice is not subjected to a desire to please ministers or the mood of the day's press.

I am very proud of the high standard of work achieved by the ACMD, and I have full confidence in my colleagues on the ACMD and its chairman, Prof Les Iverson, and so it is with regret that I feel the need to express my lack of confidence in the way that

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Yours sincerely



Dr Polly Taylor