

The APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism  
C/O Christina Rees MP Office  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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Dear Secretary of State for Health and Social Care,

**I am writing on behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Vegetarianism and Veganism.**

At our recent meeting in April, we discussed the issue of clarity of labelling on medicines. In particular, the lack of labelling and clarity regarding individual ingredients that contain animal derived products. This is not the first time that the APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism has discussed this issue. In 2017 we heard from Dr Kinesh Patel, co-author of a research letter published in the British Medical Journal which found that most (74 out of 100) medications prescribed in UK primary care contain animal-derived products<sup>1</sup>.

It is currently exceedingly difficult for healthcare professionals or members of the public to know if medications are appropriate for vegetarians or vegans, as mandatory information sheets do not outline if ingredients are animal derived or plant based. In many instances even manufacturers do not know where the ingredients are derived from. Finding out this information for patients, a growing number of whom have religious or ethical beliefs regarding animal ingredients, is increasingly becoming a time-consuming drain on medical healthcare professionals.

At our recent meeting we heard from three speakers:

- Sheetal Ladva (Medicines Information Pharmacist) outlined the issues that she faces daily owing to lack of clear labelling. Sheetal detailed common ingredients that everyday medicines contain such as lactose, gelatine, lanolin, and many others – all of which patients with specific dietary needs are unaware of.
- Dr Hannah Short (GP and specialist in female hormonal health) spoke about the increasing difficulties for GPs to find suitable medications within the ten-minute appointment times they have been allocated. The reason for this is because manufacturer lists and medication books do not have vegetarian or vegan labelling. Hannah highlighted that finding suitable

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bmj.com/bmj/section-pdf/752705?path=/bmj/348/7944/Analysis.full.pdf>

medications is crucial to the trust that a patient has in their doctor, and also that doctors have a duty to do no harm. Not having clear answers for patients may push them to take no action or to use unregulated medications.

- Hira Aslam (Pharmacist and founder of *Vegan Chemist* start-up) described research that she and her team have done which found that nine out of ten medications that use gelatine use an animal derived gelatine instead of a plant based one. Likewise, they found that 70% of paracetamol available at high street stores is not vegan and often the main reason for this is because beef gelatine is used to make the tablet.

Also in the audience was Jan Flynn, an expert with over 40 years' experience in the pharmaceutical industry. She explained the challenges and time scales of changing to non-animal derived ingredients, discussing that medications are long-tested, and it is known how they will work. Any changes to any ingredient risks changing the way the active ingredients work, which means when any ingredient changes occur, it changes the makeup of the tablet, requiring MHRA to sign off any changes. It also highlights the economics of going through product testing again in cases where reformulation is required, underlining the need for regulators to establish expectations and incentives to motivate drug manufacturers to make changes.

Dr Mahendra Patel, a board member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, also contributed to the discussion, highlighting amongst other things, the need for improved education and training on this issue for Pharmacists.

Shortly after our meeting in 2017 we [wrote to](#) then Health Secretary Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, requesting that the Department of Health looks into:

- which animal-free alternatives to prescription products already exist, and could be brought in across the board;
- producing guidance for medical professionals about consent when using animal-based medicines;
- producing guidance for manufacturers in relation to the labelling of medicines containing ingredients of animal origin, similar to the labelling on food.

The response we received pointed to the UK's status as a member of the EU and the need to avoid setting out unilateral negotiating positions in the area of medicines. Now that negotiations are concluded and the UK has left the EU, including the European Medicines Agency, we have a new opportunity to revisit this ongoing and concerning issue.

It is estimated around 10% of the UK population<sup>2</sup> have diets that may be restricted by religious beliefs. Alongside this, most recent data shows a large increase in the number of vegans in the UK (as well as vegetarians and those moving towards a diet containing less animal products), with a 2019 survey by Ipsos Mori, commissioned by The Vegan Society, finding that the number of vegans in Great Britain quadrupled between 2014 and 2019.<sup>3</sup> This is something that all trend

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/muslimpopulationintheuk>

<sup>3</sup> The number of vegans in Great Britain quadrupled between 2014 and 2019. In 2019 there were 600,000 vegans, or 1.16% of the population; 276,000 (0.46%) in 2016; and 150,000 (0.25%) in 2014. Sources: Ipsos Mori surveys, commissioned by The Vegan Society, 2016 and 2019, and [The Food & You](#) surveys, organised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the National Centre for Social Science Research (Natcen). From: [https://www.vegansociety.com/news/media/statistics/worldwide#:~:text=Veganism%20in%20the%20UK,150%2C000%20\(0.25%25\)%20in%202014](https://www.vegansociety.com/news/media/statistics/worldwide#:~:text=Veganism%20in%20the%20UK,150%2C000%20(0.25%25)%20in%202014)

line indicators suggest will continue to grow. In a YouGov survey by Eating Better Alliance in 2019, a staggering 25% of 18-year-olds surveyed identified as vegetarian or vegan<sup>4</sup>.

In your capacity as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism urges you to support our call for:

- the mandatory labelling of medicines with the words: 'Contains Animal Derived Ingredient(s)' where these are present, and the labelling of any animal derived ingredients to indicate their origin, i.e. the animal or animal part they are derived from.

Longer term, we request that you:

- act towards mandating the switching of animal derived ingredients in medicines to plant-based alternatives, wherever viable on all new products.

We look forward to hearing from you and would be happy to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Christina Rees MP, Chair of the APPG for Vegetarianism and Veganism

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/2019/Youth%20Survey%20slide%20overview%20final.pdf>