

HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE REPORT – ‘AN ACCEPTABLE RISK? THE USE OF LARIAM FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL’

PROGRESS REPORT

This memorandum provides an update on progress in implementing the recommendations of the House of Commons Defence Committee report ‘An acceptable risk? The use of Lariam for military personnel.’ This update provides commentary on the latest bi-annual Defence Statistics mefloquine publication; details the number of enquires the mefloquine Single Point of Contact (SPOC) email and telephone line has received in the period (1 October 2018 – 30 September 2019); and outlines the position on ongoing research.

On 14 November 2019, the Government published an Official Statistic¹ which showed the number of mefloquine prescriptions remains very low, with only eight prescriptions for mefloquine between 1 April 2019 and 30 September 2019, accounting for 0.2% of all antimalarial drug prescriptions. This is a 0.1 percentage point decrease in the number of mefloquine prescriptions, compared to 20 prescriptions in the previous six months, as reported in the previous mefloquine Official Statistic, which covered the period 1 October 2018 to 31 March 2019.

Of the eight prescriptions for mefloquine between 1 April 2019 and 30 September 2019, 100% had a face-to-face risk assessment prior to, or at the time of, prescription. The Official Statistic reports that one prescription did not have a record of an alternative drug being offered. An offer of an alternative antimalarial drug may have been made during the medical consultation, however, this information was not coded into the central data warehouse. Defence Primary Healthcare continue to carefully monitor the prescribing of mefloquine in line with policy.

The Department has continued to publicise the mefloquine SPOC email and telephone line, established in September 2016 for both current and former Service personnel who have concerns about their experience of mefloquine. The number of enquiries to the SPOC remains low: eight enquiries were received in the period covered by the update. As a result of low call volumes to the SPOC service and the nature of concerns raised,

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/845839/20191018-Official_Statistic_Mefloquine_Prescribing_in_the_UK_Armed_Forces.pdf

which often require signposting to a range of Veterans' support services, the future service provision is currently being reviewed. The review will explore the potential for the service to be managed as part of existing telephone helplines provided by Veterans' agencies.

In the last progress report, we stated that data cleansing; analysis and the production of a report from a MOD Research Ethics Committee-approved study into the side effects of malaria chemo-prophylaxis for military personnel exercising in Kenya would be completed during 2019. While publication of the study report is intended, this will depend on the scientific rigour of the results and, if submitted, it being accepted for publication by a reputable journal. As the report has not yet been produced, it is not currently possible to say where it will be published and when.

The Department is committed to ensuring maximal compliance with our anti-malarial prescribing policies and will continue to take steps to ensure that individual assessments are always carried out and recorded fully and consistently. I trust this update demonstrates that commitment and will further reassure the Committee that the MOD's policies and procedures for the use of anti-malarials are aligned to best national practice and properly monitored. The malaria prevention measures the MOD has in place continue to prove successful.