



## **News Release**

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### **COCAINE REPORT - SIMPSON WARNS AGAINST COMPLACENCY**

Evidence of a small increase in cocaine use in Scotland was shown today in a report published by the Scottish Executive. The report, carried out by a working group set up by the Scottish Advisory Committee on Drug Misuse, examines, for the first time, the use and impact of psychostimulants - cocaine, crack cocaine and amphetamines - in Scotland.

The group's remit was to identify the issues around cocaine, crack cocaine and amphetamine use in Scotland; look at the available evidence for best practice in prevention and service provision, and make recommendations to the Executive for better guidance for service providers and users.

Deputy Justice Minister Dr Richard Simpson said:

“This is an important report which for the first time gives us an important insight into cocaine and crack cocaine use in Scotland. The number of referrals to drug treatment services last year which involve cocaine or crack cocaine represent less than five per cent of all referrals.

“While it is clear that the problem is relatively small compared to south of the border, this does not mean we can be complacent. We will carefully consider the recommendations of this report to look at ways of improving services and prevention information to make sure we do all we can to limit its growth.”

The Working Group was chaired by Kay Roberts, area pharmacy specialist – drug misuse, for Greater Glasgow Primary Care NHS Trust. Members included representatives from the Scottish Drugs Forum, Scottish Drugs Enforcement Agency, Crew 2000, Drugs Action Aberdeen, the Health Education Board for Scotland and the Scottish Executive, as well representatives from the medical profession.



The report covers a number of issues such as prevalence, adverse effects of use, prevention and treatment services. Key findings from the report include:

### Prevalence

- Current use of cocaine and crack cocaine is low but there are signs of increasing use
- In the year 2000/01, there were 562 referrals to drug treatment services involving cocaine or crack cocaine, which represented 5% of all referrals. This compares with 139 new referrals and 2% of total referrals in 1995/96. Cocaine or crack cocaine was involved in 22% of referrals over the six month period (October 1999 – March 2000) in England and Wales.
- Police seizures of cocaine have risen from 0.25 kg in 1997 to 25 kg in 2001. This reflects an increase in availability on the streets.

### Information

- There is an urgent need for information on the dangers of crack/cocaine use for service providers and users in Scotland and a range of channels and techniques need to be used to reach the different target audiences.
- Specifically targeted information should be available to drug services, health professionals, service users, needle exchanges, employers, the police and prison services.
- The Scottish Executive should work with local Drug Action Teams (DATs) to develop local communications strategies covering psychostimulants that tailor health messages to different audiences and use different methods and general outlets such as libraries, sports centres/gyms and websites.
- Similar information should be available in settings where users who are not currently seeking treatment are likely to be found, such as pubs and clubs.
- Employers should review their workplace drug policies to include reference to psychostimulant use

### Treatment and Training

- Service planners and providers must consider increasing the number of treatment places for cocaine and crack users
- Opiate services should also take account of their clients' cocaine and crack use
- Cocaine 'hotspots' such as Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh should have basic stimulant drug services in place.
- NHS Education should ensure that substance misuse is included in the curriculum for all health care professionals as a matter of urgency

Kay Roberts, chair of the Working Group, said:

“Levels of cocaine, crack and amphetamine use in Scotland are low compared to those in England, Wales and elsewhere in Europe. But it would be unwise to be complacent. A number of reputable Scottish data sources show that levels of crack and cocaine use are rising, although those for the amphetamines are falling.

“Most existing drug services in Scotland are geared to the needs of opiate users. A study undertaken by the Scottish Drugs Forum found that stimulant users believe that existing services, health professionals and drugs workers lack the necessary expertise and knowledge to deal with their specific needs.

“My working group has made a number of recommendations, which if accepted and taken forward as matter of urgency by the Scottish Executive, DATS and service providers should enable Scotland to address these problems before they become unmanageable.”

Deputy Justice Minister Richard Simpson said:

“We recognise that there is a growing problem and we must take action to address it now. Our national Know the Score communications strategy, which was launched in March this year, aims to distribute high quality information nationally and locally and enhance our prevention activities. This will also need to take account of the fact that stimulant users may be difficult to reach and have a very different profile from opiate users.

“The report clearly states the harmful physical and psychiatric effects cocaine, crack cocaine and amphetamine use can have and it is important ways are found to effectively get this information across.

“Although the numbers of users indicated in this report may be comparatively low, this does not mean that they do not need help and it is important to make sure that our treatment and rehabilitation services are sensitive to the needs of those who seek help to overcome their use.

“It is clear there is also an important role for the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, the police and Customs and Excise in curtailing the availability of cocaine in Scotland and I am particularly pleased at the number of successful seizures in Scotland.

“There are a number of recommendations in this report which we will need to consider and take forward with the Drug Action Teams and other agencies. We are investing £128 million over three years in tackling drug misuse and local agencies are already working to determine local need, developing tailored strategies to tackle drug misuse in their area.

“I welcome this report and the Executive will look carefully at how to take these recommendations forward.”

Notes to News Editors



Making it work together

1. The Scottish Advisory Committee on Drug Misuse is chaired by the Deputy Justice Minister. Its remit is to advise the Scottish Executive and its Ministers on the continuous development of policy, priorities and strategic planning in tackling drug misuse in Scotland.

2. Psychostimulants are chemical substances that excite the central nervous system. Those covered in the report are cocaine, crack cocaine and amphetamines. 'Crack' cocaine is a cocaine alkaloid which is usually smoked and which is highly addictive. Cocaine hydrochloride is usually snorted or injected. Known physical side effects can include impotence, heart failure, strokes, kidney failure. Psychiatric effects can include learning difficulties, paranoid delusions, depression and violent behaviour. Use of 'crack' can also include pneumonia, breathing problems and burns to the mouth and throat.

3. Copies of this report are available on the [Scottish Executive](#) and [Drug Misuse in Scotland](#) websites.

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