

**PAGB response to study in the journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention* on 'The association between opioid analgesics and unsafe driving actions preceding fatal crashes'**

The report reviews prescription level opioids in the US; therefore it is inappropriate to link the findings of this study to the use of over counter (OTC) painkillers containing codeine in the UK.

As codeine containing analgesics are only available on prescription in the United States it is likely that levels would be higher than the low doses available in combination with paracetamol or ibuprofen over the counter in the UK.

Further to this the researchers themselves acknowledge that they 'cannot infer a casual relationship' between opioid analgesics and unsafe driving prior to fatal crashes. Furthermore, the route of administration of the opioid analgesics, blood concentration level at the time of crash, dosage received, or current drug regime are all unknown.

**UK OTC on pack warnings:**

Some OTC codeine and dihydrocodeine products in the UK have a drowsiness warning on pack. However, following a recent review the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) have advised that drowsiness warnings are not required for low dose codeine products.

PAGB's advice to people is to check the medicines in your home. Read the labels and leaflets and make sure you know which products may cause drowsiness. Illness itself can be a distraction for drivers if the symptoms are not treated and for those people that have to drive, consumers should ask their pharmacist for advice.

**Codeine / opioids**

Codeine is an effective painkiller and at low doses it is used in combination with paracetamol or ibuprofen for the relief of pain such as migraine, muscular and joint pains, back ache, toothache and other dental pain and period pain.

Codeine belongs to a group of medicines called opioids. Opioids mimic the effects of naturally occurring pain reducing chemicals (endorphins). They combine with the opioid receptors in the brain to block the transmission of pain signals. Opioid medicines are classified as strong or weak. Strong opioids such as morphine are used to relieve severe pain, including cancer pain. Weak opioids, such as codeine, are available over-the-counter (OTC) in low doses to provide pain relief.

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**PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain)** is the UK trade association representing manufacturers of over the counter medicines and food supplements.