



British Association for Psychopharmacology

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The Rt Hon David Willetts MP
Minister of State (Universities and Science)
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

17 August 2010

Dear Mr Willetts

We represent an organisation which is the major academic forum for the research community in the UK concerned with the study of medications used in psychiatry and related neurological conditions. We are writing with regard to the recent announcement by three leading pharmaceutical companies – GlaxoSmithKline, AstraZeneca and MSD – that they are closing major UK research centres and discontinuing UK research into new treatments for psychiatric and neurological diseases. We wish to express our deep concern at the implications of these decisions. Progress in our understanding of brain function and disease over the last 20 years has been profound, and any disengagement of pharmaceutical companies from psychiatric drug discovery and development threatens to compromise translation of these important new insights into innovative and improved medicines.

This withdrawal comes at a time when brain disorders are not only being recognised as a leading cause of disability in the western world today. Already one in four UK citizens will suffer from a mental health problem at some point in their lives and even more will be indirectly affected. The huge annual social and economic cost this incurs amounts to tens of billions of pounds. The likelihood that the discovery of, and access to, newer and better medicines will be curtailed can therefore only be viewed with grave concern. A comparable withdrawal of pharmaceutical firms from basic research into, for example, cancer or heart disease, would likely have provoked a greater public outcry, but the stigma that continues to be attached to mental illness makes it difficult to stimulate strong public and media support for psychiatric medicine.

These decisions have led to the loss of several thousand highly skilled jobs as well as considerable expertise in the area of drug development for psychiatric illness. Moreover, many young people will be discouraged from pursuing a career in biomedical science as a major avenue for employment for graduates and post-graduates has been removed. The possible “brain-drain” of skilled staff trained in the UK to other parts of the world will have long-term consequences for research and health care. The repercussions for the UK research infrastructure for neuroscience, pharmacology and related areas such as medicinal chemistry will prove to be very serious. Thus, as well as the direct impact these changes have on our members within the pharmaceutical industry who are being made redundant or forced to move jobs, there will also be consequences in the loss of opportunities for academic collaboration with pharmaceutical companies at a time when Universities are being encouraged to forge such research relationships with industry.

We would therefore encourage the government to evaluate the reasons underlying this recent commercial withdrawal from psychiatric drug discovery, as well as the measures needed to ensure that the UK’s core role in the research, discovery and development of improved drugs for treating neurological and psychiatric disorders does not suffer severe and potentially long-lasting damage.

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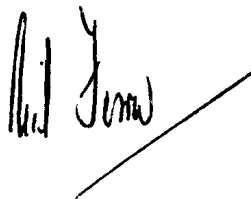
We believe that one of the major reasons for the decisions of these pharmaceutical companies is because research into the causes and treatments of mental disorders is especially vulnerable within the UK and EU. Not only are the identification and development of new treatments for brain disorders particularly demanding as compared to other diseases, but the criteria for proof of clinical efficacy and safety set by the European regulatory authorities for psychiatric drugs are unusually challenging and satisfactory reimbursements often difficult to obtain.

Addressing the challenges of tackling the unfavourable regulatory environment and preventing a damaging loss of expertise from the UK, which will negatively impact on the development of new treatments for psychiatric and neurological conditions, will require a concerted response by the UK Government in the areas of both science and health. Hence we look to you for support and leadership.

We would welcome the opportunity of meeting you and elaborating on the above issues at your earliest opportunity.



Professor Gavin P Reynolds
BAP Past-President



Professor I Nicol Ferrier
BAP President



Professor Barbara J Sahakian
BAP President-elect

Copies sent to:

The Rt Hon Andrew Lansley CBE MP, Secretary of State for Health
Alex Salmond MSP, First Minister
John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth
Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing & Deputy first Minister
Lord Martin Rees, President, Royal Society
Dr Richard Pike, Chief Executive, Royal Society of Chemistry
Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive, Society of Biology
Dr Chris Kirk, Chief Executive, Biochemical Society
Dr Kate Baillie, Chief Executive, British Pharmacological Society
Professor Trevor Robbins, President, British Neuroscience Association
Professor Dinesh Bhugra, President, Royal College of Psychiatrists
Dr Stephen Guy, President, College of Mental Health Pharmacy
Professor David Nutt, President, European College of Neuropsychopharmacology
Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, Chief Executive, Medical Research Council
Professor Douglas Kell, Chief Executive, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
Sir Mark Walport, Director, Wellcome Trust
Dr Richard Barker, Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry
Professor Sir John Beddington, Government Chief Scientific Adviser