

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

FOURTH SIX-MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT

This memorandum provides a fourth six-monthly update on the MOD’s progress in implementing the recommendations of the House of Commons Defence Committee report ‘An acceptable risk? The use of Lariam for military personnel’ (HC 567), which was published in May 2016. The Committee published the Government response (HC 648) to the report in September 2016 and requested six-monthly updates on the MOD’s progress in implementing the recommendations of the report.

On 15 November, the Government published an Official Statistic¹ which showed that the number of mefloquine prescriptions remains very low, with only 11 personnel having been prescribed mefloquine between 1 April 2018 and 30 September 2018. This compares with 31, as reported in the previous mefloquine Official Statistic, which covered the period 1 October 2017 to 31 March 2018. This constitutes only 0.2% of all anti-malarial drugs prescribed to Service personnel in this period, compared with 0.4% for the previous six-month period.

Of those prescribed mefloquine, 100% had a coded electronic entry for a face-to-face risk assessment in their patient record. The Official Statistic is based on the codes generated when a clinician utilises the electronic templates to record that a face-to-face consultation has taken place. The MOD hopes it is clear to the Committee that its new policy is working as it should.

The mefloquine Single Point of Contact (SPOC) email and telephone line, established in September 2016 for both current and former Service personnel who have concerns about their experience of mefloquine, has recorded 115 enquiries since its inception, 56 of which were received in the first month. In the six-month period covered by this update, 4 enquires have been received.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/755961/20181112-Official_Statistic_Mefloquine_Prescribing_in_the_UK_Armed_Forces.pdf

In the last six-monthly report, the Department stated that a MOD Research Ethics Committee-approved study into the side effects of malaria chemo-prophylaxis for military personnel exercising in Kenya would be published later this year. Changes in programming have meant it has taken longer to reach the required sample size than originally projected. The MOD anticipates that data cleansing; analysis and the production of a report will be completed during 2019.

The MOD hopes that this update proves the Department has positively addressed the concerns expressed by the Committee, and that its policies are working effectively. Mefloquine continues to be recommended as a safe and effective form of malaria prevention by Public Health England, the World Health Organisation and other respected bodies who take account of the body of global evidence. The MOD remains confident that the preventative measures that are in place will continue to ensure that its personnel receive the very best protection.

Since the first six-monthly update the number of mefloquine prescriptions has fallen, the number of enquiries to the SPOC has greatly reduced, and the percentage of those with a coded electronic entry for a face-to-face risk assessment in their patient record has improved and is 100% for the current reporting period.