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29 June 2015

Rt Hon Theresa May MP  
Home Secretary  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Dear Home Secretary

We the undersigned are writing to you to express our concerns about the potential unintended consequences for medical research of the Home Office's Psychoactive Substances Bill. This Bill raises other issues but this letter focuses on research because of the related amendments being considered tomorrow during the second day of debate in Committee in the House of Lords tomorrow.

Many types of important research could potentially be affected by the Bill, particularly in the field of neuroscience, where substances with psychoactive properties are important tools in helping scientists to understand a variety of phenomena, including consciousness, memory, addiction and mental illness. The Bill, as currently worded, could be interpreted to include experimental substances like these, putting such research at significant risk.

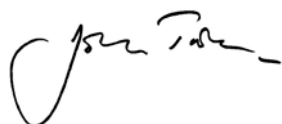
For example, a novel compound with mild psychoactive effects might be produced by a researcher for use initially in animals to explore a particular pathway associated with depression. That researcher might then – with the approval of a Research Ethics Committee – wish to proceed to small studies involving healthy volunteers, in order to better understand the substance's action on the human brain. Under the current Bill, if this substance is purely experimental and is not expected to have therapeutic effect, it will not qualify as an investigational medicinal product and will therefore not be exempt from its provisions. That researcher might therefore be at risk of prosecution for producing a psychoactive substance with intent to supply it for human consumption.

We consider it essential that the current draft Bill be amended to better safeguard basic medical research, both within neuroscience and other fields. **We therefore welcome amendment 26, proposed by Baroness Meacher, which goes some way towards achieving this** by making provision for “research pharmaceuticals being used to develop new medicines or progress neuroscience research”.

Whatever the outcome of tomorrow's debate, we encourage the Home Office to take the risk to medical research into consideration as the Bill progresses, and to seek to ensure that the final draft does not pose a barrier to important scientific work, both in neuroscience and in other areas.

We would be pleased to discuss this matter with you further at your convenience.

Yours sincerely



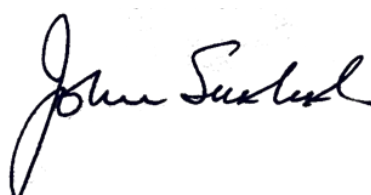
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President of the Academy of Medical Sciences



Professor Humphrey Rang  
President of the British Pharmacological Society



Professor Sir Simon Wessely  
President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists



Sir John Skehel  
Biological Secretary, Royal Society



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