About the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances

The Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS) was established in 1971 and is the committee responsible for advising approved prescribers about the prescribing of certain foodstuffs and toiletries.

Borderline substances are mainly foodstuffs, such as enteral feeds and foods that are specially formulated for people with medical conditions, but also include some toiletries, such as sun blocks for use by people with conditions such as photodermatosis.

Following the recent review of the Department of Health’s Advisory Non-Departmental Public Bodies (ANDPBs), the organisational form of the ACBS has changed. The ACBS is no longer classified by the Cabinet Office as an advisory non-departmental public body (NDPB), non-statutory and UK-wide and is now constituted by the Department of Health (DH) as a Departmental Expert Committee.

The ACBS is not part of the Commercial Medicines Unit (CMU). The CMU only provides a secretariat function to the ACBS. The status of the ACBS, and of its decisions, remains unchanged. ACBS decisions and approvals are not ‘CMU decisions’ nor do they constitute ‘CMU approval’. Neither the CMU’s name nor its logo should be used in conjunction with any ACBS ‘approved’ product.

The ACBS has two distinct functions. The first has been its function from the start; the second was added formally in 1992 and relates to the selected list scheme that was introduced in 1985:

i. To advise GPs on the circumstances in which it would be reasonable to prescribe particular non-medicinal products - mainly foods such as enteral feeds and foods which are specially formulated to be suitable for use by people with given medical conditions, but also some toiletries such as sun blocks. ACBS advice takes the form of its ‘recommended list’ which is published as Part XV of the Drug Tariff which can be found at http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/prescriptions

The information is also available in the British National Formulary (BNF).

ii. To advise Ministers on the addition of particular foods etc to Schedule 1 to the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) (Prescription of Drugs etc) Regulations 2004, the effect of which is to prohibit their prescribing by GPs on the NHS.

There have been only two instances of ACBS exercising this function since 1997.

Responsibility for providing a secretariat for the ACBS transferred from NICE to the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency (NHS PASA) at the end of March 2007. The Pharmacy Directorate of NHS PASA became the CMU with effect from 1 January 2010.

The secretariat function provided by CMU consists of:

• receiving submissions from manufacturers
• meeting with the Chairman to assign rapporteurs for applications
• producing an agenda and précis for submissions
• distributing the agenda and documentation
• hosting the meeting
• taking minutes at the meeting
• distributing the approved minutes
• informing applicants of the results of the meeting
• informing the Prescription Pricing Division of amendments to the Drug Tariff
• responding to queries