

Man jailed for ten years for convictions including selling prescription-only medicines worth more than £3.7million

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A man who unlawfully supplied Class B and Class C controlled drugs and a range of unauthorised medicines has been sentenced at Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court following an investigation by the MHRA's Criminal Enforcement Unit.

A man has been sentenced to ten years imprisonment after pleading guilty to charges relating to the illegal sale of prescription-only medicines with a street value exceeding £3.7 million, following an investigation by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulator Agency's (MHRA) Criminal Enforcement Unit (CEU).

Having pleaded guilty to five offences at an earlier hearing, Mark Robert Witchell, aged 61, of Stoke-on-Trent, was sentenced on 3 March 2026 at Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court. Three others were convicted and sentenced in March 2023 with similar offences.

The offences, which took place between August 2013 and December 2015, involved the unlawful supply of Class B controlled drug codeine, and Class C controlled drugs alprazolam, diazepam, tramadol, zolpidem and zopiclone. The group also sold prescription-only medicines, including Cialis and Levitra tablets, without a valid prescription, and supplied a range of unauthorised medicinal products including Kamagra, Apcalis, Aurogra and others.

In addition to the drug supply offences, Witchell pleaded guilty to having entered into arrangements that facilitated the acquisition, retention, use or control of criminal property under section 328(1) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. He has also pleaded guilty to several other charges related to fraud following a police investigation. Sentencing on these will occur separately.

Witchell was arrested upon attempting to re-enter the United Kingdom via ferry following a 10-year period overseas in Brazil. For the first time in the MHRA's history, the CEU took the rare step of seeking extradition and work was ongoing to extradite him to the UK, at the time of Witchell's return.

Head of the MHRA Criminal Enforcement Unit, Andy Morling said:

This case involved the large-scale illegal supply of powerful controlled drugs and unauthorised medicines, putting the public at serious risk of harm. The fact that Witchell spent a decade overseas thinking he had evaded justice makes this result all the more significant.

The dedication and professionalism shown by our Criminal Enforcement Unit officers throughout this long and complex investigation has been exceptional. These crimes damage and destroy lives, and this case sends a clear message that there is nowhere to hide for those who seek to profit from medicines trafficking.

Specialist Prosecutor for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Ben Reid said:

Witchell showed complete disregard for the vulnerable individuals who purchased from his websites and the dangers of the drugs he supplied, which were prescription medicines with side effects and high potential for addiction. Indeed, relatives of victims described the devastating effects of addiction to drugs such as zopiclone on their loved one's health and mental wellbeing.

Organised crime has no respect for borders, and we worked tirelessly to obtain evidence from abroad on this case, as well as liaising closely with partners including Staffordshire Police and the MHRA.

This case demonstrates that the CPS is committed to pursuing criminals like Witchell wherever they are, for however long it takes.

Notes to editors

- The specific offences that Mark Robert Witchell pleaded guilty to were: one count of supplying a Class B controlled drug (codeine) contrary to section 4(3)(a) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971; one count of supplying Class C controlled drugs (alprazolam, diazepam, tramadol, zolpidem and zopiclone) contrary to section 4(3)(a) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971; one count of selling or supplying prescription only medicines otherwise than in accordance with a prescription, contrary to regulations 214(1) and 255(1)(a) of the Human Medicines Regulations 2012; one count of selling or supplying unauthorised medicinal products contrary to regulations 46(1) and 47(1) of the Human Medicines Regulations 2012; and one count of being concerned in an arrangement facilitating the acquisition, retention, use or control of criminal property contrary to section 328(1) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.
- The Criminal Enforcement Unit is a dedicated law enforcement capability within the MHRA. The unit collects and analyses criminal intelligence to identify illegal activity involving medical products and investigates cases to prevent and disrupt offending and bring offenders to justice.
- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. All our work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgements to ensure that the benefits justify any risks.
- The MHRA is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).
- For media enquiries, please contact newscentre@mhra.gov.uk, or call 020 3080 7651.

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