



## Stem Cell Activators

<b>Type of case</b>	Broadcast Standards
<b>Outcome</b>	In Breach
<b>Service</b>	The Word Network
<b>Date &amp; time</b>	24 July 2023 19:00
<b>Category</b>	Harm and promotion of products
<b>Summary</b>	The programme contained potentially harmful claims that by ordering and consuming the presenter’s products as shown in the broadcast it could improve a variety of serious health conditions. In breach of Rules 2.1, 9.1, 9.2, and 9.13(g).

## Introduction

The Word Network is a religious channel aimed at the Christian community and available on satellite subscription services. The licence for the service is held by Word Network Operating Company Inc (“the Licensee”).

*Stem Cell Activators* (or “the Programme”) was presented by Joseph Cristiano and his wife Lori Cristiano and included references to products that viewers were invited to purchase to treat various medical conditions. The Programme focussed on one product, the “CNT Stem Cell Activator”, and included graphics for other products. A voiceover introduced the Programme by saying that “*Dr Joe is a Naturopathic Doctor with over 45-years experience in natural health*”.

Joseph and Lori Cristiano talked about the potential benefits of the “CNT Stem Cell Activator” product, for example:

*“[the product] is specifically for ligaments. Soft tissue tendons, ligaments, joints and so forth” and is “...the most popular activator we have and it’s amazing what it’s been helping with people”.*

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*“it’s the most popular because it’s the most common problem to deal with. We’ve seen this because we work with people that have pancreas issues, you know,*

*diabetes, kidneys, nerve issues and things like that but the musculoskeletal is what gets banged up whether you've worked construction all your life or you just had hard physical work all your life or been in sports".*

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The following content appeared in a full-screen graphic and was read out by Lori Cristiano:

*"CONNECTIVE TISSUE SUPPORT (CNT) regulates intercellular communication and supports cellular tissue & tissue regeneration in the connective tissues of the body. Helps protect cells from toxic action & has great potential in gerontology. Possible applications for toxicity, viruses, sex organs, gerontology, sports injuries, hernias, sagging skin, ligaments, tendons, connective tissue, arthritis, inflammation, scarring, prolapsed uterus, stretch marks & much more".*

The presenters referenced the ingredients and apparent lack of contraindications of the CNT Stem Cell Activator, for example:

*"...and what's good about these activators is that they don't interfere with any medications, they are all natural, they're all plant based, they don't interfere with supplements you know they're easy to take, they're little drops you put in water every morning..."*

CNT Stem Cell Activator and other products were also referenced (via graphics) throughout the Programme, accompanied by references to various health conditions, for example:

*"27 DIFFERENT – STEM CELL ACTIVATORS CNSN-Peripheral Nerves / Neuropathy / Nerve Damage, CNT-Connective Tissue / Tendons / Ligaments / Joint Pain & Inflammation, HRT – Heart / Afib / Arrhythmia / Heart Disease".*

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*"27 DIFFERENT – STEM CELL ACTIVATORS Optiweight – Weight Management / Weight Loss, IMN – Immune System / autoimmune / Lyme Disease / Lupus, KDN – Kidney Support / Blood Pressure / Dialysis Support / Edema".*

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*"27 DIFFERENT – STEM CELL ACTIVATORS LGI-Intestinal / Colitis / Leaky Gut / IBS, LNG-Lungs / COPD / Bronchitis, PANC-Pancreas / Diabetes / Sugar, PROST-Prostrate, OST-Bone / Osteoporosis / Fractures".*

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*"27 DIFFERENT – STEM CELL ACTIVATORS THY-Thyroid / Hypo / Hyper, SPL-Spleen, THYM-Thymuss / Immune System, LVR-Liver, GB-Gallbladder, ONC-Cancer, CNSE-Brain / Eyes / Dementia / Anxiety / Stroke".*

The Programme also included testimonials from people who said that they used the "CNT Stem Cell Activator" and how doing so had improved their health conditions. For example:

*"...I was watching a show on TV [graphic showing a telephone number] and there was Dr Joe Christiano on delivering his information on his stem cell activators, and... then I heard all these testimonies of success on his activators which target specific areas of the body, all the different ones. So, I was recommended when I*

*called Dr Joe's [graphic showing a URL] and that I would be best with the two: one for the bone, the OST which has something to do with the tissue, and then the CNT which is dealing with the tissues themselves. It was just unbelievable how quickly; within a week the pain was gone and I'm walking around the lake and everything and walking around and continuing every morning... this little dosage [graphic stating "Results vary"] and I'm just now coming up to well I think a month. What a relief!... Because here I am, 72 years old and I have a lot of life and activity and plans for my life I just need to feel good I always want to feel good and healthy".*

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*"...a few days later I called Body Redesigning... I told them that I had bone on bone on my right knee and what would be the best stem cell activator that I would use for myself. And she mentioned CNT. It's for connective tissue. So, when I started the 20 drops, I had no pain after four days and as I speak with you now, I can bend my knee [images of speaker stretching] I stretch it every day, and before I couldn't do it, when I used to put my knee... down I would have excruciating pain in it and I have no pain in it...To be able to use these products and I'm so thankful that Dr Joseph Christiano has a heart for other people, that you don't have to spend 3000 or 5000 dollars when you have a product here that you can afford here, and it works and it's awesome. As I speak right now, I got chills going up my head because I'm so excited about it and...I can't explain it, I'm overjoyed that this works, I know it works and I tell people about it. It's just awesome".*

Periodically throughout the Programme contact details for the company, Body Redesigning by Joseph Christiano, were broadcast, for example:

*"...In fact what I'd like you to do right now is call my office [telephone number stated twice] and talk to one of my girls there, they are very informative, they would be glad to help you out. Or go to my website [URL stated twice] and let's put an end to that pain".*

*"If you would like to order our Stem Cell Activators or Dr Christiano's book Stem Cell Revolution, please call [telephone number] or go to our website at [URL)".*

Finally, the following full-screen graphic was shown at the end of the Programme for approximately five seconds:

*"Body Redesigning by Joseph Christiano Disclaimer*

*The statements on Body Redesigning by Joseph Christiano websites, TV program[me]s, products or associated products and materials have not been evaluated by any regulatory authority and are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent a disease or medical condition. The content provided by Body Redesigning by Joseph Christiano is presented in summary form, is general in nature, and is provided for informational purposes only. Do not disregard any medical advice you have received or delay in seeking it because of something you have watched and or heard on any TV shows with Joseph Christiano ND or read on our websites or associated materials. Please consult your own physician or*

*appropriate health care provider about the applicability of any opinions or recommendations with respect to your own symptoms or medical conditions as these diseases commonly present with variable signs and symptoms. Always consult with your physician or other qualified healthcare provider before embarking on a new treatment, diet or fitness programme. We assume no liability or responsibility for damage or injury to persons or property arising from any use of any product, information, idea, or instruction contained in the materials provided to you. Body Redesigning by Joseph Christiano reserves the right to change or discontinue at any time any aspect or feature containing our information”.*

Ofcom received a complaint that the Programme included references to products that the complainant considered were potentially harmful and unregulated in the UK.

Ofcom requested information from the Licensee about any commercial arrangements associated with the references to the products in the Programme. In the information provided to Ofcom, the Licensee confirmed that it had sold editorial airtime to Joseph Christiano in half-hour time slots and “had no other connection to his ministry or his show content”. It added that it would inform Mr Christiano of the complaint. Based on the information provided and our assessment of the Programme, we considered the content raised potential issues under the following rules of the Broadcasting Code (“the Code”):

- Rule 2.1: “Generally accepted standards must be applied to the contents of television and radio services...as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion in such services of harmful and/or offensive material”.
- Rule 9.1 “Broadcasters must maintain independent editorial control over programming”.
- Rule 9.2: “Broadcasters must ensure that editorial content is distinct from advertising”.
- Rule 9.13: “The product placement of the following is prohibited:
- g) any product, service or trade mark that is not allowed to be advertised on television”.

## Response

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The Licensee did not provide representations in response to Ofcom’s initial request for comments or on Ofcom’s Preliminary View.

## Decision

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Reflecting our duties under the Communications Act 2003, Section Two of the Code requires that generally accepted standards are applied to the content of television services so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion of harmful and/or

offensive material. Section Nine of the Code requires broadcasters to maintain a distinction between advertising and editorial content and includes rules on product placement that reflect statutory requirements, including the prohibition on the product placement of particular products.

In reaching this Decision, Ofcom took account of the right to freedom of expression, as set out in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (“ECHR”). Article 10 provides that everyone has the right to freedom of expression including the right to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without unnecessary interference. The right to freedom of expression is not absolute. Ofcom must exercise its duties in light of the broadcaster’s and audience’s Article 10 rights and not restrict that right unless it is satisfied that it is necessary and proportionate to do so. This means that each and every time Ofcom applies the Code to broadcast content, we give careful consideration to the broadcaster’s and the audience’s Article 10 rights.

## Rule 2.1

Rule 2.1 requires that: “Generally accepted standards must be applied to the content of television and radio services...so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion in such services of harmful and/or offensive material”.

When considering a programme’s compliance with Rule 2.1, Ofcom assesses the nature of the content and whether there is a reasonable likelihood of it causing members of the public actual or potential harm. Context is important and the extent of any protection required will depend on all the relevant circumstances, including the service on which the material is broadcast, the degree of harm likely to be caused, the likely expectation of the audience and any mitigating factors.

The Code enables broadcasters to transmit programmes that cover health issues and the perceived benefits of alternative and complementary treatments, provided that audiences are adequately protected from potentially harmful material. It is for the broadcaster to decide how to provide such protection where necessary.

Ofcom examined the Programme to assess whether it contained potentially harmful material. Ofcom took into account that the Programme included testimonies in which people explained how purchasing and using the “CNT Stem Cell Activator” had brought about their recovery from illnesses, for example:

Lori: *“I have one that had the bad knees an avid horse rider, loves to ride horses, but couldn’t get on a horse because their knees were so bad and [quotes customer] ‘I don’t know what’s in these activators but they seriously work!’ Yeah and now she’s back to riding her horse. I have another one who is bone on bone with her knees and after two bottles no more pain. Dr wouldn’t... even do the surgery because of the age, but now they’ve got a solution or something that can help eliminate some of the pain. Another one was a bowler you know with his shoulder... and... he was a bowler who couldn’t bowl anymore because his shoulder was so, so bad and so he started taking them, three weeks, no three months later his shoulder is back to normal and he’s out bowling again. I had a swimmer, another one was a swimmer, the breast, you know doing the breaststroke and the butterfly, she couldn’t get through the flip it was just so bad, now she’s swimming*

*again. I mean we get people with hip problems, knee problems, back, neck, I mean just all sorts of different testimonials that come into the office”.*

Joseph: *“I mean and let’s face it in fact if you’re experiencing pain you’re going through the same thing, I did when I was living with chronic pain. But these stem cell activators, like [refers to woman in testimonial] can turn your situation around, it does for me. When I hurt myself or re-injure myself, I take a certain activator that targets that particular area and before I know it, I’m back on top of my game again, its just absolutely wonderful. But you notice, you found out by listening to her testimonial, that the physicians wanted her to have surgery because she was bone on bone. And when you’re bone on bone the only option left is surgery, but I want you to stop and think about that. Before you opt for surgery, I want you to understand that there are natural ways these technologies, these stem cell activators that are really a game changer for you. They... really fix the problem”.*

Other products were referenced (via graphics) for serious medical conditions such as dementia, stroke, Lyme disease, osteoporosis, lupus, dialysis support, heart disease and cancer.

Ofcom has published guidance on health and wealth claims in programmes (“the Guidance”)<sup>1</sup> that reflects research we commissioned on audience attitudes to potentially harmful content involving such claims in programmes. This research indicated that there is a hierarchy of factors affecting the level of potential harm arising from health and wealth claims. The Guidance highlights the severity of the situation (e.g. a life-threatening illness), the level of targeted exploitation (i.e. the vulnerability of the audience) and the authority of the speaker as primary factors that would influence the level of potential harm arising from health or wealth claims. The Guidance also highlights how the inclusion of an alternative perspective or a warning (e.g. one that advises audience members to consult a qualified doctor before making decisions about their health based on information included in a programme) can be used by broadcasters to protect viewers from potential harm.

The Guidance makes clear that individuals who are suffering from serious medical conditions are considered vulnerable and therefore require protection from potentially harmful content. In this case we considered the Programme was clearly targeting such viewers, specifically those suffering from serious and potentially debilitating medical conditions. Claims that the “CNT Stem Cell Activator” could “*turn your situation around*” or represented an effective alternative to surgery were made throughout the Programme:

*“...before you opt for surgery, I want you to understand that there are natural ways...that if you are taking medicines and it’s not happening then maybe activators is the answer”.*

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*“...when a person sees their physician, they go to an orthopaedic surgeon or a doctor, and they go ‘you need to have surgery’ and they go ahead and have*

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<sup>1</sup> See: [Guidance Notes Section 2: Harm and offence](#) - Issue Twelve: 18 July 2017

*surgery and don't get me wrong, if it's an emergency surgery you've got to have it, but I don't know anyone who's gone through the surgery that has gone back to normal function. Because every time you have surgery...and they cut through tissue even if they mend it and they sew it back and the stem cells heal the tissue, the body starts developing scar tissue and that scar tissue disrupts your mobility. So now you're limited to what you can do, the blood flow can't circulate well, and whenever there's a lack of blood flow, there's an impossibility for healing".*

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The product claims were presented with a high degree of certainty and were accompanied by explicit calls to action to purchase the products.

Furthermore, the claims and testimonials were provided in the context of a programme presented by Joseph Cristiano, who introduced himself as a "doctor", with a graphic that referred to him as "*Joseph Cristiano ND*".<sup>2</sup> The voiceover for the Programme also introduced Joseph Cristiano as "*...a Naturopathic Doctor with over 45-years experience in natural health*". We therefore considered the presenter was likely to be perceived by the audience as having authority in the field of medicine.

While the Programme explored the alleged benefits of the "CNT Stem Cell Activator" product on ligaments, joints and tendons, there were audio and visual references to other health conditions accompanied by explicit references to products available for viewers to purchase. The Programme included visual references to various medical conditions, including treatment for heart disease, lupus, stroke, osteoporosis and cancer. During the Programme Joseph and Lori Cristiano also made the claim that their products "*don't interfere with any medications*" and that "*they are all natural, they're all plant based, they don't interfere with supplements*".

The medical conditions referenced in the Programme are clearly serious health conditions. In the case of cancer, Parliament considered it appropriate to prohibit advertising which offers to treat cancer, which is reflected in section 4 of the Cancer Act 1939. As stated above, audience members may be considered vulnerable when they are suffering from serious health issues, and the severity of the condition may increase this vulnerability. Given the context in which the references to the serious medical conditions appeared in the Programme, we considered viewers would reasonably consider that these medical conditions could be treated effectively by using the products referenced in the Programme.

In Ofcom's view the tone and presentation of the statements and product claims were likely to be persuasive, with a strong likelihood that viewers would make decisions about their health based on the content of the Programme. While the Programme contained three brief visual and verbal references to the potential effectiveness of the product (e.g. "*...Now results will be different for everyone...*" and "*Results vary*"), we do not consider these provided sufficient context to the numerous claims of efficacy made throughout the 28-minute Programme. Further, such claims had the potential to cause harm as they could lead audiences to believe, in the case of serious health issues referenced in the Programme, that it was potentially unnecessary to seek, rely on, or continue receiving, conventional medical treatment.

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<sup>2</sup> "ND" refers to Naturopathic Doctor. Naturopaths work in the field of complementary therapy. In the [UK](#) complementary and alternative medicine is treatment that falls outside mainstream healthcare.

Within the UK, medicinal products and medical devices are governed by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (“MHRA”). In relation to medicines, there is a licensing scheme that ensures that the products meet applicable standards of safety, quality, and efficacy<sup>3</sup> and processes, e.g. manufacture and distribution are undertaken in accordance with appropriate licences and inspections are conducted. In particular, products that claim to treat health conditions must be licensed before they can be sold in the UK.<sup>4</sup>

In this case, we took into account that the products referenced in this Programme do not appear on the MHRA’s published list of licensed products. We were concerned that the numerous strong medical claims regarding the efficacy of these unlicensed products were broadcast. There was therefore the potential for harm to the audience because a treatment unlicensed in the UK was presented as being effective and safe for use by people with serious medical conditions and could have been purchased and used by viewers with potentially serious consequences for their health.

There are various methods broadcasters can use to provide adequate protection for viewers from potential harm that might arise from health and wealth advice and claims in programmes. One approach commonly used by broadcasters is the inclusion of a warning, for example advising viewers to consult a qualified medical practitioner before making decisions about their health based on the programme.<sup>5</sup>

We took into account that a full-screen graphic containing lengthy text (around 200 words) was broadcast at the end of the Programme advising viewers to consult their own “*physician*” or “*qualified health provider*” before starting new treatment. The graphic advised viewers to “*not disregard any medical advice you have received or delay in seeking it because of something you have watched and or heard on any TV shows with Joseph Christiano ND or read on our websites or associated materials*”. We considered that this warning was likely to have gone some way to alerting viewers of the need to seek independent medical advice before using any products referenced in the Programme. However, the lengthy full-screen disclaimer was displayed for approximately five seconds and therefore this was unlikely to have provided sufficient time for viewers to read in full. Further, the graphic was the only explicit warning to viewers during the 28-minute Programme that was, in our view, a platform for unlicensed products which were presented as treatments for various medical conditions.

Taking into account the above factors, our Decision is that the Licensee had not provided its viewers with adequate protection from potentially harmful content in the Programme, in breach of Rule 2.1 of the Code.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/medicines-and-healthcare-products-regulatory-agency/about>

<sup>4</sup> The MHRA in the Blue Guide (Advertising and Promotion of Medicines in the UK) states, “By regulation 279 of the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 (“Regulations”), medicinal products which do not have a valid licence - a marketing authorisation, traditional herbal registration, or homeopathic registration - may not be advertised for medicinal purposes”. In addition, it states, “unlicensed medicines should not be mentioned, to comply with regulation 279 of the Regulations which prohibits advertising of medicines for which no marketing authorisation or registration is in force. Treatments that involve the use of unlicensed medicines may not be described as ‘clinically proven’ or similar”.

<sup>5</sup> [Ofcom Guidance Notes Section 2](#): Harm and offence - Issue Twelve: 18 July 2017

## Rule 9.1

The rules in Section Nine are designed to safeguard editorial integrity and ensure that programming and advertising are distinct from each other. The rules provide important protection for viewers by ensuring that they can differentiate between an independent editorial voice and paid-for commercial content.

It is essential that broadcasters take steps to ensure that content transmitted as programming is not used as a vehicle to promote the interests of a third party. In circumstances where broadcasters have acquired programming, they should be able to demonstrate that they have taken adequate steps to obtain all information necessary for them to make appropriate independent editorial decisions.

In its representations, the Licensee stated that it “...*only sells broadcast time to [Joseph Cristiano] in one half hour time slots. [It] ha[s] no other connection to his ministry or his show content*” and that it would inform Joseph Cristiano of the complaint.

Licensees are required by the conditions in their Ofcom broadcasting licence to ensure that programming broadcast on the licensed service complies with the Code. In Ofcom’s view, the background information supplied by the Licensee suggested that it had limited engagement with the content. Further, the Licensee chose not to respond to Ofcom’s formal request for comments to demonstrate how it exercised independent editorial control over the content. Based on the information available, Ofcom’s Decision is therefore that the Licensee has not demonstrated independent editorial control of the Programme, in breach of Rule 9.1.

## Rule 9.2

Rule 9.2 states that broadcasters must ensure that editorial content is kept distinct from advertising. This distinction between editorial content and advertising supports consumer protection and is particularly important in the context of references to products or services that are subject to advertising restrictions.

In this case the Programme was subject to a commercial arrangement. Commercial arrangements should not lead to the creation of programming content that is a vehicle for promoting the funder or its products and/or services, or the distortion of editorial content for the purpose of any such promotion.

Broadcasters should carefully consider factors such as: the number and/or frequency of promotional references to products or services; repeated and unchallenged positive messages and claims regarding product efficacy; calls to action; and business contact details etc., as Ofcom research<sup>6</sup> shows that viewers consider this type of content to be more akin to advertising.

In this case, viewers were invited both by the presenters and in graphics to call phone numbers displayed throughout the broadcast. Those phone numbers were not specific to the Programme or the channel but in our view were clearly linked to the company Body Redesigning by Joseph Cristiano. According to the company website, Joseph Cristiano is the president and founder of this company which is based in the United States.

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<sup>6</sup> [Commercial references in Television Programming Published 5 December 2022](#)

As highlighted above, the Programme contained: several explicit audio and visual invitations to purchase the products referenced throughout the Programme; third-party contact details; repeated and unchallenged overtly positive messages about the company's products; and explicit claims of efficacy. In our view, the Programme effectively acted as an advertisement for the products associated with Joseph Cristiano. As such, Ofcom's Decision is that the programming was not sufficiently distinct from advertising, in breach of Rule 9.2.

### Rule 9.13(g)

Based on the information provided to Ofcom during the course of this investigation, Ofcom considered the references to products, services and trade marks associated with Joseph Cristiano met the definition of product placement.<sup>7</sup> Rule 9.13(g) prohibits the product placement of any product service or trade mark not allowed to advertise on television. The BCAP Code sets out those products and services that are subject to advertising restrictions, including a requirement that medicines must be licensed before they are advertised on television.<sup>8</sup> Further, the Human Medicines Regulations require that medicinal products which do not have a valid licence may not be advertised for medicinal purposes.<sup>9</sup> Products that claim to treat any health conditions must be licensed by the MHRA before they can be sold in the UK.

This Programme included numerous audio and visual references to products that were claimed to treat medical conditions. As highlighted above, the products referenced in the Programme do not appear on the MHRA's published list of licensed products and therefore cannot be advertised on television in the UK. Given the references to products in this Programme meet the definition of product placement, our Decision is that those references breached Rule 9.13(g).

As stated in our Note to Broadcasters<sup>10</sup> published on 23 January 2023, Ofcom is likely to consider breaches involving harm to be particularly serious and these may result in us taking further regulatory action, such as imposing a statutory sanction. The content identified in this investigation appears to represent serious breaches of the Code. **Ofcom therefore puts the Licensee on notice that it is minded to consider this case for the imposition of a statutory sanction.**

### Breaches of Rules 2.1, 9.1, 9.2 and 9.13(g)

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<sup>7</sup> Ofcom Broadcasting Code ([Section 9.5 Meaning of 'product placement'](#)): "The inclusion in a programme of, or of a reference to, a product, service or trade mark where the inclusion is for a commercial purpose, and is in return for the making of any payment, or the giving of other valuable consideration, to any relevant provider or any person connected with a relevant provider, and is not prop placement".

<sup>8</sup> [BCAP Code Section 11: Medicines, Medical Devices, Treatment and Health](#). Rule 11.19 "Medicines must have a licence from the MHRA, the VMD or under the auspices of the EMA before they are advertised. Advertisements for medicinal products must conform with the licence. Advertisements must not suggest that a product is "special" or "different" because it has been granted a licence from the MHRA. For the avoidance of doubt, by conforming with the product's indicated use, an advertisement would not breach rule 11.3".

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>10</sup> [Note to Broadcasters - Monitoring of broadcasters' compliance \(23 January 2023\)](#)