DSM Foundation responds to the updated review of ketamine use and harms from the government's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

Wednesday 28 January, 2026

Recent significant rises in the use of ketamine by young people, and in the harms it can cause – in particular in relation to bladder damage, dependence, and drug-related deaths - have led to growing concerns for drug education charity the DSM Foundation. In their student surveys, ketamine is consistently perceived as the most prevalent substance being used by 15-18 year olds, after alcohol, nicotine and cannabis, overtaking others such as cocaine and MDMA, and this has been part of a bigger picture of concern, with cries for help from parents, teachers and healthcare professionals from across the country.

Given this context, the DSM Foundation welcomes the publication of this updated review from the ACMD, commissioned by the government more than a decade after its previous review in 2013. This detailed, comprehensive and wide-ranging report on the current context in relation to ketamine provides valuable insights into what the specific issues are, and what the ACMD considers needs doing to address these – which is a lot. Although much of the attention surrounding the report will inevitably focus on the recommendation relating to its legal classification, we know that there's so much more that needs to be done to reduce harm to young people, and this is reflected in the long list of recommendations detailed in the report.

Of course it's the recommendations relating to prevention, education, training, and harm reduction that are of most interest to a drug education charity like the DSM Foundation, because they know how essential this is as part of any response to drug-related harm – and they're already working very hard to enable young people to manage risks specific to ketamine, as part of the broader information, skills and strategies their work always integrates.

The charity has developed specialist content which covers the effects and risks of ketamine, identifying early signs of bladder damage and of possible dependence, as well as decision-making skills and strategies contextualised to ketamine, harm reduction and support seeking. Ketamine-focused workshops have been delivered by the DSM Foundation team in schools from the northeast of Scotland to the southwest of England, and information for young people and parents and caregivers can be found on the website. A free ketamine resource pack for schools will be made available shortly to download from the website, which will include a short staff briefing and resources for teachers to use with students in drug education lessons.

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE, founder and director of the DSM Foundation said, "As we've seen the prevalence of ketamine rising, and the numbers of young people coming to harm growing - and in ways quite unique to this particular substance - we've been so concerned to do all we can to work with young people to keep themselves safe. We're all about supporting young people to make safer choices about drugs, but we know how many factors can mitigate against that for young people, and how important effective education is. We very much hope the government responds positively to the strong recommendations the ACMD has made in relation to education, and that a better understanding of what's already available will lead to the development of more evidence-informed resources and programmes that will support young people, and the important adults in their lives, to reduce risk and harm, and to find support that really helps them should they ever find they need it."

Information for editors:

The DSM Foundation is a drug education charity established in 2014 following the death of 16 year old Daniel Spargo-Mabbs from an accidental overdose of ecstasy. His family felt that he simply hadn't known enough to be able to make decisions that would keep him safe, and realized there was a huge gap in the resources and support available to schools, so set up the charity in order to spare other families going through what they had experienced.

The aim of the DSM Foundation is to provide young people with relevant, age-appropriate, up to date and evidence-based information about drugs so they develop the skills to make choices that will keep themselves and their friends as safe as possible. To this end, the charity is currently working in almost 750 schools, colleges and community organisations with children and young people, and also provides workshops for parents and caregivers, and training for school and college staff – the two groups shown

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by NHS survey data as the most likely sources of information about drugs and alcohol sought out by 11-15 year olds. Educational settings are also able to access “I Love You Mum, I Promise I Won’t Die”, a verbatim play by Mark Wheeller that was commissioned by the charity to tell Dan’s story in the words of his family and friends, through studying the work itself (sometimes due to it being a GCSE Drama set text on the Eduqas syllabus), or booking a Theatre in Education performance. Schools and colleges can also download age-appropriate, relevant, up to date and evidence-based drugs education lesson resources free of charge from the DSM Foundation website for delivery by teachers through PSHE/PSE provision.

For more information about the DSM Foundation, go to https://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk/.

Media enquiries about this press release or the work of the DSM Foundation should be sent to media@dsmfoundation.org.uk.

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