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**PRESS RELEASE**

**DRUG ADDICTION**

**EN**

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## **PRESS RELEASE ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF BUPRENORPHINE AS A NARCOTIC**

The Interministerial Task Force Against Drugs and Drug Addiction (MILDT) has requested that buprenorphine (Subutex®), currently listed as a venomous plant, be listed as a narcotic, in a process independent from any public health undertaking. This would have a negative impact on its accessibility, due to the considerable red tape it would create for physicians and pharmacists. In contrast, the flexibility of the current delivery system has contributed to the efficacy of prevention efforts and HIV/AIDS treatments and enabled real progress in France's risk reduction policy (in 2004, drug addicts accounted for only 3 % of new HIV-infections detected, as compared to 40 % of AIDS cases twenty years earlier, before buprenorphine emerged).

Recognised for those very good results, the French system is seen as an example by many countries, particularly in Europe. Therefore, it is important not to discourage the policies of other countries and not slow down access to care for thousands of newly-detected patients in those countries who are also heroine addicts. The request for reclassification came in response to the Minister of the Interior's desire that measures be taken to combat misuse and drug trafficking. Such misuse is the result of a minority group, often not including drug addicts (studies have shown that only 2 % of "patients" are involved in such activity) and nothing has established that the requested classification would be effective in fighting back the illegal market. France's risk-reduction policy has had a positive impact in terms of public safety, making it possible to drastically reduce overdoses, bring down criminal activity due to heroine trafficking and the reintegrate thousands of HIV sufferers into society. Too often, there is a contradiction between public health efforts and public safety efforts. The priority needs to remain with healthcare, risk-reduction and prevention.

Moreover, the French system is viewed as an example by many countries, particularly in Europe. Because of this, it is important not to discourage politicians from other countries and not hold up access to healthcare for thousands of new heroine-dependent patients in those countries. The WHO's Expert Committee on the classification of psychoactive products met in Geneva in late March 2006, and decided not to classify buprenorphine as a narcotic for the time being.

This is why CNS wishes that buprenorphine be maintained in its current category, in order to sustain the good results achieved in terms of public health and risk reduction policy. In order that the product remain limited to medical use, CNS invites the relevant authorities to make full use of existing means to fight against misuse and trafficking.