

# Boots blames charity for morning after pill 'trolling'

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THE managing director of Boots has issued a legal warning to a family planning charity that she alleges has encouraged people to troll her company's executives online.

Lawyers for the pharmacy chain have written to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service claiming it had encouraged harassment of Boots employees as part of a campaign to lower the price of the morning-after pill.

The letter emerged as Boots yesterday announced it would be introducing a new £15.99 morning-after pill. Previously the cheapest one it offered was £26.75. In the letter, sent at the start of August by the law firm Schillings and seen by *The Daily Telegraph*, Boots says the campaign had caused "immense personal distress" to five senior Boots executives.

They included Elizabeth Fagan, the managing director, Richard Bradley, pharmacy director, and Kevin Birch, retail pharmacy operations director.

It claimed the use of an email "widget" on the BPAS website, which allows supporters to contact five senior employees, constituted the "facilitation and tacit encouragement of personal abuse" which was "flagrantly unreasonable". The letter lists exam-

ples of abuse including, "You will have to answer to God for what you have done" and "You really are a vile, intensely peculiar sack of corporate pus".

Other messages called the addressee a "repugnant, strange, freakishly disgusting moralist" or a "vile, nasty, strange excuse of a half man".

The company initially came under fire in July after it sent the charity a letter in which Marc Donovan, its chief pharmacist, said it would not drop its prices to bring it in line with other pharmacies, because it "would not want to be accused of incentivising inappropriate use".

The charity said it was "perfectly reasonable to provide the names of executives for the public to write to", because the company had "previously ignored messages sent to customer services". It added that the messages were not representative of those sent through by supporters of the campaign, which were "overwhelmingly polite and thoughtfully expressed" and included testimonials from women who have needed to use emergency contraception because they have been raped, or who have had to skip meals in order to afford the pill.

A total of 24,000 emails were sent during the BPAS campaign.

Yesterday the email form was still available on the website and lists Ian Blythe, the firm's head of corporate social responsibility, as a possible recipient. The other four have been removed.

A spokesman for Boots said: "As a responsible employer, we actively seek to protect our colleagues from abuse and harassment. In our legal letter to BPAS we made it very clear that we welcome the debate on the provision of EHC, and respect their right to raise this issue with us. We asked them simply to remove personal email details from their campaign widget and to agree not to encourage personal abuse of our people. BPAS have not yet agreed to do this and we will continue to ask that they agree to our simple request, which was made only to protect the interests of our employees."

## Pill problems Consultations are 'putting women off'

Women are deterred from seeking the morning-after pill because of compulsory pharmacist consultations, Dr Jane Dickson, a vice president of the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive

Healthcare, has warned. Dr Dickson said there was no medical reason for the discussions. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society says the consultation is an important method of giving women advice.