‘Dr Death’ life insurance ad banned for causing ‘serious and widespread offence’

An online ad featuring British serial killer Harold Shipman has been banned by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

The Facebook and Instagram advert for Leicester-based DeadHappy showed the former GP, dubbed ‘Dr Death’, alongside the words “Life insurance. Because you never know who your doctor might be.”

Shipman killed himself in Wakefield Prison in 2004, aged 57, after he was jailed for life for murdering 15 of his patients. He is thought to have killed between 215 and 260 elderly and vulnerable patients during his time as a GP in Hyde, Greater Manchester.

The ASA said it received 115 complaints that the ads irresponsibly caused serious and widespread offence and unjustified distress.

DeadHappy has apologised, saying the adverts first appeared at 2pm on January 23 and were taken down at 8am the next day when it became clear there was an issue.

The firm said it was reviewing its processes in relation to the creation and approval of ads “and would endeavour to make better informed decisions going forward”.

The ASA said the ads “trivialised and made light of the murders committed by Harold Shipman, such that they were likely to cause both serious and widespread offence to those who saw them”.

It said: “We further considered that any reference to the murderer in advertising material was likely to be distressing,

particularly for those who had lost family members or friends at Shipman's hands and that, in the context of an ad promoting life insurance, the distress caused was unjustified.

"We concluded that the ads were not prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and to society and did not comply with rules on issues of harm and offence.

"We welcomed DeadHappy's assurance that they would not be repeated."

In a statement, DeadHappy founder Andy Knott said: "We are sorry. In our attempt to be provocative and make people really stop and think about their need for life insurance, we have made a mistake and for this we apologise.

"We will now go away and immediately review all of our current and future marketing campaigns to ensure that we learn from this mistake."

It is not the first time the company has been in trouble.

In late 2019 an ad featuring an image of a man leaning his head against a wall and the strapline "Life insurance to die for" was banned for trivialising suicide.

A viewer who believed the ad was alluding to depression and male youth suicide complained that it was irresponsible and offensive.

Dead Happy said it took mental health "very seriously".

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