

Life insurance ad featuring serial killer Harold Shipman attracts criticism

An online life insurance ad featuring the face of dead serial killer Harold Shipman has caused offence to some people.

The advert for Leicester-based DeadHappy appeared on some Facebook feeds showing the former GP, dubbed 'Dr Death', and the words: "Life insurance. Because you never know who your doctor might be."

Shipman committed suicide in Wakefield Prison in 2004, aged 57, having been convicted and sentenced to life for murdering 15 elderly patients four years earlier. Overall, he was accused of killing hundreds of elderly and vulnerable patients in northern England over two decades.

Those offended by the ad include Kathryn Knowles, founder of insurance broker Cura, who said she has logged an official complaint to the Financial Conduct Authority, the City regulator, and the UK advertising watchdog, ASA.

She said: "There is a firm that is promoting life insurance using the picture of a mass murderer to promote their services.

"I will name neither as I won't give them the satisfaction of popping up in more search results. Please know that many of us in insurance find this beyond despicable.

"I would hope the FCA and ASA would take action on this. I would like to lodge a formal complaint to both over this advert and will provide a copy to them.

"It's disgraceful."

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) watchdog said it was reviewing complaints about the ad.

In a statement Andy Knott, founder of DeadHappy, said: “We’re not simply disruptive, we’re just trying to make better products in order to close the gap. We are called DeadHappy and our strapline is ‘Life insurance to die for’ so we are aware of the provocative (and to some the very shocking) nature of our brand.

“But being provocative is different to being offensive and it is of course never our intention to offend or upset people. It is our intention to make people stop and think.

“If however you have been personally distressed by this advert we do sincerely apologise.”

“Death is still a taboo subject in our society, which is why we feel so passionately about ‘changing attitudes to death’. We do take risks with our brand and sometimes we may step over the line, whatever or wherever that line may be, and whoever chooses to draw it.”

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”.

Upholding the complaint, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) said it was “concerned” about the image of the man, who was alone with his back to the audience, and ruled that the ad must not appear again.

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