

May 2003

FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DESK

Around this time of year PHARMAC seems to become a bit of a campaigner, working to encourage people to use medicines wisely to improve their health. We've got two of these campaigns running at the moment, with a third due to start up at the end of May. PHARMAC works closely with a range of other health agencies, such as Independent Practitioner Associations, the Heart Foundation, and the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation, to develop and run these campaigns, and the results can sometimes be dramatic. For instance, the Wise Use of Antibiotics campaign, which this year enters its fifth year of PHARMAC co-ordination and funding, saw a 14 percent drop in antibiotics prescribing in one year, and has stayed at this level since 2001.

We've also developed a proposal to change the way medicines are dispensed, to make it more convenient for patients and allow District Health Boards to fund improved or additional services. We'd like to hear your views on this proposal to have the majority of prescriptions dispensed in three-monthly lots.



Wayne McNee

Proposed changes to pharmaceutical dispensing

PHARMAC has developed a proposal to have most prescriptions dispensed in one lot, and has been asking the public for its views on the idea. Essentially, about 70 percent of prescriptions would be affected by a change, with a number of pharmaceuticals (including controlled drugs and more expensive drugs) continuing to be dispensed monthly.

The proposal has a number of benefits, including increased convenience for patients who would need to make fewer trips to the pharmacy, potentially more people taking all of their medicine, while the move would also free up about \$35 million for District Health Boards to reinvest in other health services.

Several issues have been raised in consultation and some organisations asked for an extension to the one-month consultation deadline. PHARMAC has extended the deadline for submissions to all interested parties, until 5pm on Friday 30 May.

If you want to send a submission, the address is PO Box 10-254 Wellington, or email to jessica.nisbet@pharmac.govt.nz

Maori member appointed to PTAC

Taranaki GP Tony Ruakere has been appointed to the Pharmacology and Therapeutics Advisory Committee (PTAC), which provides clinical advice to PHARMAC. Dr Ruakere is the first Maori to be appointed to PTAC, which is in line with the strategies outlined in PHARMAC's Maori Responsiveness Strategy.

Dr Ruakere has experience in rural, urban and iwi medical practices extending back to 1972, and has links into the medical, academic and Maori communities.

We're delighted that Dr Ruakere brings his background and experience to PHARMAC's principal medical advisory committee.

Asthma campaign

The Responsible Use of Inhaled Corticosteroids campaign was launched in Wellington in February 2003. It involves doctors, pharmacists and asthma educators in encouraging people to improve their

management of asthma and lower the average dosage of asthma preventer medicines. The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation of New Zealand has helped develop campaign resources and the aims of the campaign are in line with the latest adult asthma guidelines, produced by the NZ Guidelines Group.



You might have seen the campaign's Wheeze In: Breeze Out posters on buses, while radio stations have also been broadcasting an ear-catching advertisement.

Services to promote the responsible use of medicines

Prescribers will continue to have access to a number of valuable resources once PHARMAC finalises a contract with a new consortium put together to provide nationally consistent advice on the responsible use of medicines.

The consortium is made up of people with experience in providing quality information and includes such medical heavyweights as the University of Otago, Healthlink South, IPAC and First Health.

We're confident that the new consortium can continue to strengthen this valuable service to doctors.

New-look website

PHARMAC has revamped its website to make it easier to use, and to provide a wider range of information on PHARMAC's activities and pharmaceutical funding.

New features include minutes of the Pharmacology and Therapeutics Advisory

Committee (PTAC), lists of new funding applications, and more in-depth data on pharmaceutical expenditure.

If you haven't had a look at the website yet, check it out at www.pharmac.govt.nz.

One Heart Many Lives

This new campaign is being piloted in Gisborne and Porirua. Its aim is to make people aware of their risk of having a heart attack or stroke, and how to take steps to lower their overall risk.

PHARMAC has been working with the Heart Foundation and Sport and Recreation NZ (Sparc) on the campaign, which includes poster and mass media advertising in the pilot areas.



Once the pilot is completed, we'll take a look at its effectiveness before deciding whether to roll it out nationally.

Wise Use of Antibiotics

This annual campaign has been extremely successful in reducing, and keeping down, the amount of antibiotics prescribed during the winter flu season.

Since its inception in 1999, the campaign's core message has basically remained the same – don't expect antibiotics as a cure-all for colds and flu.

This year we're again developing the campaign with Independent Practitioner Associations and working on a launch in conjunction with Plunket.

Contact Us

PHARMAC welcomes your feedback. You can contact us at PO Box 10-254 Wellington, by phone on 0800 66 00 50, or via the PHARMAC website www.pharmac.govt.nz

