

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

PHARMAC DISAPPOINTED AT MULTINATIONAL'S DECISION

PHARMAC will be doing all it can to ensure New Zealanders continue to have access to the heart drug felodipine, following the surprise decision by multinational company AstraZeneca to suddenly cease supplying it to New Zealand.

Chief Executive Wayne McNee says the move creates concerns for people taking felodipine, and PHARMAC will work with Pacific Pharmaceuticals and Medsafe to ensure replacement products are available and that New Zealand patients are not disadvantaged by the decision.

Felodipine is a calcium channel blocker used in the treatment of angina and raised blood pressure. It is fully subsidised in New Zealand and taken by approximately 50,000 patients.

Last week PHARMAC announced that it would relist the generic felodipine brand Felo ER from 1 December, following its safety and efficacy being established to the satisfaction of Medsafe. Both the generic and AstraZeneca's brand would have been funded at the same level.

AstraZeneca would continue to have a monopoly in the 2.5mg strength felodipine, one of three dosage strengths available under full subsidy.

"We were aware AstraZeneca had been threatening to withdraw the 2.5mg after 1 December. This in itself is a little surprising as the market for the 2.5mg strength is worth about \$1.2 million a year," says Wayne McNee.

"However, this latest move has really come out of the blue, and with no notice it will be of concern to those patients who take felodipine. We will be doing all we can to ensure those people can continue to have access to this drug, regardless of the decision made by AstraZeneca."

AstraZeneca had already raised the price of its brand by 70 percent in the past year, and PHARMAC had been paying more for it to enable people to continue using the drug under full subsidy.

Wayne McNee says PHARMAC will continue to talk with AstraZeneca to find out how much stock is available, and will endeavour to accelerate the re-listing of Felo ER. This will depend on stock being available through Pacific Pharmaceuticals.

PHARMAC is also looking at what options are available for patients who take the 2.5mg strength.

ENDS

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