

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

PHARMAC predicts continuing drop in HRT prescribing

Even fewer New Zealand women are likely to opt for Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) despite the already large drop-off in use, predicts drug funding agency PHARMAC.

Figures published in PHARMAC's Annual Review, released today, show a 38 percent drop in the number of women prescribed HRT during the 2003 financial year. This represents about 30,000 less women taking HRT than in the June 2002 year. Expenditure on subsidised HRT correspondingly fell by about \$2.8 million.

PHARMAC Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie says the New Zealand experience reflects international trends in HRT prescribing, and follows the publication of a number of studies in 2002-2003. These included the Women's Health Initiative study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in July 2002. Continued publication of studies such as the Million Women Study, in The Lancet in July 2003, continue the pressure on HRT prescribing.

"It's clear that New Zealand women and their doctors have taken note of the international literature emerging on the risks of HRT," says Dr Moodie.

"PHARMAC has noted the publication of these studies and has been closely looking at the issue of access to HRT. This has included a review by the Hormone and Contraceptives sub-committee, and the Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC).

"We are pleased that the messages from these studies have been taken on board and that women are making decisions about their healthcare in an informed manner. There are risks associated with many prescription medicines, however it appears that in the case of HRT, many women have arrived at the conclusion that the risks of continuing treatment outweigh the benefits.

"Our analysis suggests that prescriptions for HRT will continue to decline over the next few years, although the rate of decline will slow. Further accelerated drop-offs may depend on the publication of future data on the effects of HRT."

PHARMAC is continuing to closely monitor HRT prescribing patterns with monthly reports provided to the PHARMAC Board.

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For more information contact (021) 863-342.