

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

NEW ANTI-DEPRESSANT DRUG FUNDED

A new treatment for depression will be funded from 1 January 2004 following an agreement between PHARMAC and pharmaceutical company Wyeth (NZ) Ltd.

Venlafaxine (Efexor XR) will be listed on the Pharmaceutical Schedule for the treatment of severe depression, and can be used both in hospitals and in community settings.

PHARMAC medical director Dr Peter Moodie says funding venlafaxine will give clinicians another valuable tool to help people whose depression has proved difficult to treat.

“Venlafaxine is an effective treatment for those people who have not responded to other antidepressants, so it is pleasing to be able to provide fully-funded access to it,” says Dr Moodie.

“We are aware that clinicians have been asking to have this drug available for patients, so its benefits are already recognised. The clinical advice PHARMAC has received has also been positive so we are happy to have reached an agreement with Wyeth that has allowed it to be funded.”

PHARMAC is anticipating that just under \$1 million will be spent subsidising venlafaxine in the first year, rising to about \$5 million after five years. Patient numbers are difficult to estimate, but could be up to 8000, Dr Moodie says.

Since Venlafaxine exhibits inhibition of serotonin and noradrenaline uptake it may be useful in those patients who failed to respond to SSRIs or other antidepressants, Dr Moodie says.

Dr Moodie says this listing also assists in meeting the Government’s commitment to improving mental health services, as outlined in the New Zealand Health Strategy.

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