

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

New fully funded treatment for alcohol addiction

Funding has been approved for a new drug to help people beat alcohol addiction.

Government drug-funding agency PHARMAC has agreed to provide subsidy for naltrexone (ReVia) from 1 June 2004.

Naltrexone works by stopping people getting the “high” they normally expect from drinking alcohol. It has fewer side effects than the currently-listed treatment disulfiram, has been shown to get better results and can help people better manage a reduction in their drinking.

PHARMAC Chief Executive Wayne McNee says it’s important to remember that naltrexone is most effective when it is used as part of a comprehensive alcohol treatment programme, and this would be made explicit for people to access naltrexone.

“We’re aware that clinicians view this drug as a more effective weapon in the battle to beat alcohol addiction, so we’re delighted to be able to list it on the Pharmaceutical Schedule,” says Wayne McNee.

“Alcohol addiction can have a terrible impact on people and their families, so there’s clear benefit giving people more help to kick the drinking habit. We believe this is an effective use of taxpayers’ money to fund a drug that is used in the short-term to produce positive long-term results.”

PHARMAC’s estimate is that about 800 people will be eligible to take naltrexone as part of their anti-alcohol addiction programme in the first full year, and that this number will rise over the next two years. Approval to take naltrexone would initially be for a three-month period, but this could be extended for a further three months if people were benefiting and still needed it.

“Our advice is that most people would obtain benefit within a short time frame,” Wayne McNee adds.

Subsidies for naltrexone are expected to be about \$4 million over the next five years.

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