

From the chief executive's desk

Looking at the pharmaceutical expenditure patterns of the year to date, it's clear that there has been a divergence from what was forecast when we negotiated the pharmaceutical budget with DHBs back in mid-2003.

Most significantly, the delay in introducing reduced co-payments through the new Primary Healthcare Organisations meant that less medicine was dispensed. We've also seen a greater than expected use of Close Control, reducing the medicine dispensed to patients, but increasing dispensing costs to DHBs.

At the same time, PHARMAC has been able to make a number of new investments in medicines for New Zealanders, with new treatments for depression, childhood arthritis and hepatitis C approved for funding. This issue of InPHARMation outlines some further investments that will see even more New Zealanders gain access to subsidised medicines in future years

We're anticipating that, even with all this new investment, expenditure for 2003-04 will be within the revised target of \$541 million, and that's good news for taxpayers and District Health Boards.

Wayne McNee



More new medicines funded

PHARMAC's investments in new medicine are continuing. Three further treatments have been approved for funding, and another has had access expanded just two months after first being listed on the Pharmaceutical Schedule.

The new medicines are naltrexone, which is used to treat alcohol addiction; a new cholesterol-lowering medicine called ezetemibe; and a new protease inhibitor combination for the treatment of advanced HIV/AIDS, Kaletra.

Access has also been widened a new hepatitis C treatment, pegylated interferon in combination with ribavirin.

Asthma management campaign

There has been a healthy change in the use of asthma preventers, in line with the aims of PHARMAC's Responsible Use of Inhaled Corticosteroids campaign.

The campaign has been running since February 2003, and is based on evidence New Zealanders' average doses of these medicines are higher than recommended levels.

The Responsible Use of Inhaled Corticosteroids campaign aimed for a reduction in average doses, and according to prescribing data in the year to February 2004, the average dose has reduced by 7.1 percent. Further analysis is being done to determine whether there are regional trends, and differences among men, women and different ethnic groups.

Clinical Evidence pilot

PHARMAC and ACC have got together to give GPs subsidised access to the British Medical Journal's Clinical Evidence publication. This is a resource designed to summarise the evidence around treatments for various conditions.

Our involvement is driven by a desire to give doctors access to good quality unbiased information on medicines and other treatments. Clinical Evidence provides just that.

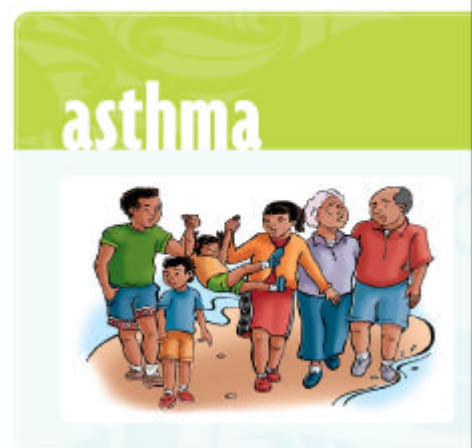
At the moment it's a pilot scheme for six months or so, and we will be asking GPs for their feedback on how well they have used the resource before we decide whether to extend access to a wider group.

New tool for asthma educators

PHARMAC's Demand Side team has been working with the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation and Tu Kotahi (the Maori Asthma Society) to develop a new resource to help asthma educators teach people how to better manage their asthma.

The resource is a flip-chart which is designed for use in one-on-one or small group sessions. It's aimed at helping people talk face-to-face with asthma educators to better understand the disease and how to manage it.

The resource was launched at the national Maori asthma educators hui in Wainuiomata, and is seen as a useful addition to the tools asthma educators already use.



Wise Use of Antibiotics

PHARMAC's annual campaign to promote the wise use of antibiotics was re-launched in May 2004, to again coincide with the winter cold and flu season.

This campaign has been running since 1998, and has been successful in promoting the message that antibiotics aren't effective against cold and flu viruses. Research carried out by Colmar Brunton shows that New Zealanders now understand better that antibiotics aren't the right treatment for colds and flu. So New Zealanders are far less likely to expect treatment with an antibiotic for colds and flu than they were four years ago.

Overall there has been a 16 percent reduction in antibiotic prescribing since the campaign began. This year, PHARMAC is running the campaign in conjunction with Plunket, the Pharmaceutical Society and the Royal NZ College of General Practitioners.

PHARMAC welcomes contact from patients, health professionals and health sector groups. You can contact us on 0800 66 00 50 (9am-4pm weekdays) or via the PHARMAC website www.pharmac.govt.nz.