

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media Release

Better use of asthma medicine reported by PHARMAC

New Zealanders with asthma have reduced their daily doses of a popular asthma treatment following international concern that the drugs were being overused.

In its Annual Review, PHARMAC says as a result of the concern, it developed a campaign with the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation of New Zealand and other interest groups. Initial results after the campaign showed that people had decreased daily dosages of inhaled corticosteroids by 8.6 percent.

The adult asthma management campaign, *Responsible Use of Inhaled Corticosteroids*, initially provided prescribers with resources to help them review their patients' doses. The campaign also provided training for pharmacists, asthma educators and nurses.

Medical Director, Dr Peter Moodie says the campaign is part of an overall focus for PHARMAC on providing assistance to both prescribers and patients.

He says cardiovascular disease was another area of concern addressed by PHARMAC last year.

The *One Heart Many Lives* campaign included promoting lifestyle changes to help lower overall cardiovascular risk, and the prescribing of cholesterol-lowering statins, which can help prevent heart attacks and strokes. Its target groups include Maori and Pacific Island men aged 35 and over.

“The campaign emphasises the role of both lifestyle changes and medicines in lowering overall cardiovascular risk,” says Peter Moodie.

The campaign was piloted successfully in Gisborne and Porirua during 2003, and then extended into five high need areas.

“Initial assessments showed the campaign resulted in greater awareness of cardiovascular disease among the target group and more people being referred for Green Prescriptions.”

Green Prescriptions provide managed physical activity programmes for people referred by their doctor to a local sports trust.

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Under a new agreement, PHARMAC and SPARC have increased funding for the programme, by 40 percent.

PHARMAC also reports that since the inception of its *Wise Use of Antibiotics* campaign six years ago, there has been a 16 percent decrease in antibiotic prescribing. The campaign was launched because of concern about the use of the drugs to treat viral infections like colds and flu when they are only effective against bacterial infections.

“Most of the reduction occurred in the early years, and though overall volumes are continuing to decline, the campaign is now focussed on continuing vigilance and increasing understanding of the issue,” says Dr Moodie.

Research carried out at the end of 2003 showed that nearly half the people visiting their doctor understood the role of antibiotics in treating colds and flu. That compares with one out ten people three years before.

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