

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

PHARMAC disappointed drug promoted despite potential side-effects

PHARMAC is calling for drug companies to act more swiftly when concerns are raised over potential side effects and to be responsible in the promotion of their drugs.

The call follows reports that show arthritis drug Celebrex, a Cox-2 Inhibitor, more than doubles the risk of heart attacks and strokes. The latest findings follow the international withdrawal two months ago of another Cox-2 Inhibitor Vioxx due to similar side effects.

PHARMAC Chief Executive Wayne McNee says it was disappointing that Pfizer continued to aggressively promote Celebrex to doctors despite the withdrawal of Vioxx and similar concerns being raised about its own drug.

“A United States study raised concerns about Celebrex, and as a result the Food and Drug Administration asked Pfizer to voluntarily withdraw its advertising. However, it is concerning that despite this request, Pfizer has said that it will continue to promote the product to doctors.

“It is difficult to comprehend how a company can justify continuing to promote the safety of these drugs, and to claim there is no increased risk of cardiovascular events.”

Wayne McNee says the safety concerns around these drugs have been known for at least four years. PHARMAC decided in January not to fund Cox-2 Inhibitors based on the evidence of potential risk to patients.

“Drug companies must take these concerns very seriously, and it is irresponsible for them to continue to promote the benefits of drugs and ignoring the potential risks.”

He says when making the funding decision PHARMAC concluded that there was no evidence the COX-2 Inhibitors worked better than the older medicines.

“This shows clearly that new is not always better. Patient safety is always an important part of our decision making and in this case there were clear question marks over the side effects of these drugs.”

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