

*Media release*

## **Breast cancer therapy takes a step forward**

Treatment of New Zealand women with breast cancer is set to take a forward step following PHARMAC's decision to widen access to one of the aromatase inhibitor drugs.

The decision will see letrozole (Femara) funded as a first-line treatment for advanced breast cancer. This will mean patients with advanced breast cancer will be able to receive letrozole prior to the traditional treatment, tamoxifen, says PHARMAC Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie.

"Breast cancer is a serious health concern for New Zealand women, with about 2000 cases occurring each year," Peter Moodie says.

"We're pleased to be able to make this decision which is a step forward for subsidised treatment of the disease."

Peter Moodie says PHARMAC is continuing to look at the emerging evidence on the use of aromatase inhibitors in early stage breast cancer, and this remained a further option for widening access in future.

Under the change, which will take effect from 1 January 2005, PHARMAC expects about 600 women each year to will be eligible to receive letrozole.

Widening access to letrozole continues PHARMAC's programme of new investments in medicine, which saw 15 new products added to the Schedule in the 2004 financial year, and further additions since including pioglitazone (for Type 2 diabetes), ezetimibe (for raised cholesterol) and fentanyl (for pain relief).

[ends]

For more information call (021) 436-429.