

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

PHARMAC examining issues raised around asthma inhalers

Government drug funder PHARMAC says it is taking seriously complaints that have been received about the Salamol brand of salbutamol asthma inhalers.

PHARMAC Chief Executive Wayne McNee says a small number of complaints have been received, and these were being referred to the Ministry of Health's medicines regulator Medsafe, and the products NZ distributor Air Flow Products.

Some complaints have centred on the inhalers becoming blocked or not working, others on the taste of the product.

Wayne McNee says PHARMAC takes these issues seriously and is examining having independent tests done on Salamol to determine whether it meets specifications. Other options are being considered, including asking PHARMAC's expert medical committee PTAC to review the safety concerns that have been raised.

"It's important to remember that Salamol has been assessed by Medsafe as being as safe and effective as Ventolin, the product it is replacing," Wayne McNee says. "It is widely used internationally including in its country of manufacture, Britain, where it has sales of about 400,000 inhalers every month.

"The supplier, Air Flow products, recommends washing the inhalers to prevent blockage. Information has been sent to pharmacists and GPs to help patients to be informed about this.

"It is important that this asthma reliever medicine is effective for patients so we think it is a good idea to have an independent body examine it."

Salamol is due to become the sole subsidised salbutamol inhaler from 1 July 2005. An alternative reliever medicine, terbutaline (Bricanyl) also continues to be subsidised. PHARMAC is considering deferring implementation of sole supply of Salamol for up to 3 months until it has had a chance to assess the complaints that have been made.

The funding of Salamol is anticipated to produce savings in the pharmaceutical budget of about \$1.7 million over 18 months.

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