

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

New Year, new drug for arthritis patients

People with severe rheumatoid arthritis will have a new subsidised treatment in the New Year following a decision by government drug-funding agency PHARMAC.

The new generation arthritis treatment adalimumab (Humira), one of the TNF alpha inhibitor drugs, will be fully funded for people with severe rheumatoid arthritis from 1 January 2006.

The listing of adalimumab is a significant investment, in the region of \$35 million over five years.

PHARMAC Chief Executive Wayne McNee says TNF alpha inhibitors can make a significant difference to the quality of life for people with arthritis.

“For some people with rheumatoid arthritis this can have enormous benefits in enabling them to become more active again,” Wayne McNee says.

“We have been working to see at least one of these drugs funded, and this has now been made possible through our agreement with Abbott Laboratories.”

PHARMAC estimates that initially a small number of patients will be prescribed adalimumab, but that this group will grow to nearly 1000 people per year after five years. Access to adalimumab will be carefully targeted with access criteria similar to those in Australia.

“Many people already obtain good results from using medicines such as methotrexate or leflunomide, which attack the underlying causes of rheumatoid arthritis,” Wayne McNee says. “However, for a small number of patients these medicines aren’t sufficient so a TNF alpha inhibitor can make a real difference.”

PHARMAC already subsidises one TNF alpha inhibitor, etanercept, for juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Etanercept will continue to be available to those patients.

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