

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

New weapon for battle against HIV/AIDS

The first of a new type of drugs to treat HIV/AIDS will be funded for New Zealanders from next month.

Enfuvirtide (Fuzeon) is a new type of drug used to treat people with the most advanced stages of HIV/AIDS. Enfuvirtide is the first in a class of anti-HIV medicines known as fusion inhibitors. Other HIV medicines treat the virus once it has invaded cells – enfuvirtide blocks the virus and fights it outside the cells.

Its unique action is most useful in combination with other anti-HIV medicines, for people whose disease has become resistant to some other anti-HIV medicines.

Enfuvirtide adds to the 12 drugs (and one combination of those drugs) that are already subsidised for HIV/AIDS.

PHARMAC's Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie says that funding enfuvirtide will offer a new treatment to people whose options have been all but exhausted.

“Most people with HIV are managing the condition well on existing treatments, but the nature of the condition means there is always a small group of people who become resistant to those drugs,” says Dr Moodie. “Having a new type of drug for these people to use is another step forward.”

There are about 700 people currently being treated with subsidised HIV medicines, with expenditure in the region of \$9 million per year.

PHARMAC estimates that up to 18 people will be treated with enfuvirtide each year, with a five-year investment estimated at \$800,000.

Enfuvirtide will be subsidised from 1 September 2006.

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