Work on a Medicines Strategy is underway and one of the key areas that is emerging is how well medicines are used once they have been dispensed to people. There is often a focus on New Zealanders gaining access to new medicines, however there is much to be gained from better using the medicines that are already available. How many people, for instance, take their medicines as instructed by their doctor? How much might people’s health improve if they did? There is also a growing trend for people seeking information on health – the rise of so-called “health literacy”. This area of optimal use – how to make sure best use is made of the $600 million of medicines that are currently funded – is in our view the single biggest challenge we face. For its part PHARMAC runs a number of campaigns that aim to ensure people use medicines as well as possible, and are well informed about them. To do this even better there needs to be a shift of focus from simply funding medicines to ensuring they are used optimally.

This issue of inPharmation outlines some of those campaigns, including our long-running and successful Wise Use of Antibiotics campaign, and the new Gut Reaction campaign that is getting underway.
One Heart Many Lives encourages people to take steps to reduce their chance of having a heart attack or stroke. The driving force behind extending the campaign into Northland is the sobering statistic that Maori men in Northland have the worst life expectancy of all New Zealanders. On average, Maori men in Northland live 14 years less than other NZ men. The campaign, which is being run in partnership with the Northland DHB and community agencies, aims to address this disparity through a range of community-driven initiatives. The campaign kicked off with a whanau day in Kaitaia on 22 April.

Optimal use of medicines is emphasised in the campaign, which also encourages people to take control of their lives by eating better, becoming more active and stopping smoking.

One Heart Many Lives
Northland

Tamati’s story

PHARMAC first encountered Tamati Davies in early 2006 when the One Heart Many Lives campaign was being developed in Hawke’s Bay.

Tamati weighed in at 225kg before he was interviewed for a mini-documentary on heart disease and its impact on families. He had already had one heart scare (he was not yet 40) and was struggling to take his doctor’s advice to lose weight.

Now, following the involvement of Hastings PHO Taiwhenua O Heretaunga, Tamati has become more active, eats better and has shed some 95kg since his health scare. He is now down to a relatively trim 130kg and wants to go lower, has completed a triathlon and is a spokesman for the impact of lifestyle changes.

Building a culture of safety around medicines and reducing medication errors are two of the key themes for a two-day workshop in Wellington this month.

The workshop, Medicines and the Patient Experience - Practical Solutions, is a collaboration between PHARMAC, the Safe and Quality Use of Medicines Group, the Ministry of Health, ACC and BPAC. It involves government agencies, health professionals and consumers examining ways to ensure that safety considerations underpin patient care with medicines.

The workshop includes speakers from NZ and internationally sharing perspectives on how to ensure medicines are used well. Optimal use of medicines is a key theme throughout the workshop.
The Bugs Are Catching On...

Remember The Rules Of Engagement

If In Doubt Check It Out!

Antibiotics Don't Do Colds And Flu!

Take The Lot, No Matter What!

Wise Use of Antibiotics is PHARMAC’s longest-running public information campaign, and aims to encourage the optimal use of these important medicines. For 2007 the campaign is going ‘back to basics’ and emphasising the messages that have characterised the campaign for more than a decade:

- Antibiotics don’t do colds or ‘flu
- If in doubt check it out;
- and for those who do require an antibiotic

The 2007 campaign is again being run in conjunction with pharmacists and Plunket and features new graphics and, for the first time, a TV commercial.

Get your flu vaccinations

The subsidised influenza vaccine season for 2007 is now underway.

We anticipate increased demand as the ‘winter sniffles’ season emerges, and that the record number of doses distributed last year may be bettered. Doctors’ surgeries are now booking vaccinations so now is the time to give yourself the best available protection from influenza.

PHARMAC has secured supplies from two vaccine manufacturers for 2007—Vaxigrip® from Sanofi Pasteur through Merck, Sharp & Dohme NZ and Fluvax® from CSL Pharmaceuticals. These vaccines have been formulated to provide immunity against three strains of influenza virus.

The influenza vaccine composition for New Zealand in 2007 is:

- A(H1N1): an A/New Caledonia/20/99 (H1N1)-like strain (15 μg HA per dose)
- A(H3N2): an A/Wisconsin/67/2005 (H3N2)-like strain (15 μg HA per dose)
- B: a B/Malaysia/2506/2004-like strain (15 μg HA per dose)
This campaign is new for 2007 and aims to address high levels of prescribing for a type of medicine to treat gastro-intestinal disorders. Proton Pump Inhibitors (sold as Losec or Somac) are valuable medicines to have in treating gastro-intestinal disorders, peptic ulcers and dyspepsia. PPIs are generally regarded as safe and effective for long term and intermittent treatment.

However, PPIs are expensive relative to some other medicines that do much the same thing. They may be used unnecessarily to treat patients with only mild dyspepsia when older, less expensive and just as effective medicines may be just as suitable.

Gut Reaction aims to encourage prescribing of PPIs only for those patients whose conditions merit them. Lifestyle changes, such as avoiding certain foods or reducing alcohol consumption, may be better ways for people to reduce those uncomfortable feelings of heartburn. In others, simple over-the-counter heartburn treatments may work just as well.

The first phase of the campaign is underway and involves pharmacists interviewing some of their patients who have been taking PPIs for six months or more. Information is also being prepared for doctors, practice nurses and consumers. You’ll hear more about this campaign as it continues over the coming months.

For more details check out www.gutreaction.co.nz