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Media release

Changes to increase confidence in PTAC advice

Under new PTAC Terms of Reference released today, PHARMAC will publish more information about the deliberations of the clinical advisory committees that advise PHARMAC on funding decisions.

The possible membership base of PTAC is also being widened to allow for a greater range of health professionals to be on the committee.

PTAC, the Pharmacology and Therapeutics Advisory Committee, is a statutory committee of independent clinical experts appointed by the Director General of Health. PTAC's recommendations to PHARMAC about pharmaceutical funding applications are an important part of the process PHARMAC uses to fund medicines.

PTAC subcommittees provide more specialised advice, on areas such as cancer, diabetes or heart disease. The Terms of Reference also cover the operation of those subcommittees.

Overall, the changes to PTAC's Terms of Reference are designed to provide more clarity about the Committee's role and functions, and to increase public confidence in its operations.

While the review confirmed that previous arrangements already enabled PTAC to provide high quality objective advice to PHARMAC, it identified some opportunities for change and improvement.

PHARMAC's Chief Executive Matthew Brougham says changes to the PTAC Terms of Reference are in three main areas:

- increased publication of information;
- increased clarity of the role, scope and functions of PTAC; and
- increased clarity on the relationship between PHARMAC and PTAC.

"Taken together, these changes should lead to increased confidence in PTAC's operations and, as a result, PHARMAC's decisions. Many of the changes seek to address concerns held by some stakeholders about PTAC's operations," says Matthew Brougham.

"PTAC's advice has long been one of the pillars of PHARMAC's decision-making, and it is important the advice continues to be of the highest quality.

"The changes will result in even more information being provided about how the committee reaches its recommendations. This should help build confidence in those recommendations and, ultimately, PHARMAC's decisions."

Information on the committee's deliberations will now include publishing more minutes relating to pharmaceutical funding applications on PHARMAC's website, including when PTAC has deferred making a recommendation. PHARMAC will also begin publishing minutes from PTAC subcommittee meetings on its website.

More

The Committee's operations – its membership, scope of activity and specific functions – have also been clarified in a number of ways. For example:

- membership can now include senior health professionals, such as public health physicians, pharmacists or nurses – not just medical practitioners as in the past. This change reflects that many types of health professionals, not just doctors, have an interest and expertise in prescription medicines; and
- PTAC can now request that a subcommittee undertake a “rapid review”, in order to receive specialised advice from a subcommittee in a more timely way.

The relationship between PHARMAC and PTAC has also been clarified, such as making clear that PTAC can provide PHARMAC with any and all information and views it considers desirable.

“These changes will seek to clarify the relationship between PTAC and PHARMAC and address concerns held by some stakeholders.”

Separate to PHARMAC's review, the Ministry of Health has been reviewing the appointment protocol for PTAC members. The Ministry has led this work because the Director-General of Health appoints PTAC members. The Ministry expects to complete the appointment protocol review by the end of the year.

Matthew Brougham says PHARMAC acknowledges the time and effort people put into making submissions to the review and the constructive nature of submissions. In addition to the revised Terms of Reference, PHARMAC will be releasing a summary of submissions.

The end of this review, along with the Ministry's work on the appointment protocol, mark two significant events in the implementation of Medicines New Zealand, the Government's medicines strategy. PHARMAC is continuing to implement actions arising from that strategy.

The revised Terms of Reference are effective immediately.

ENDS

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