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PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

Doctors take to electronic application system

Nearly 3000 doctors are now using an electronic system for helping patients to access some medicines.

Special Authority is a targeting mechanism used by PHARMAC to ensure medicines are prescribed for patients who most need them. The electronic applications system, developed by PHARMAC and the Ministry of Health's claims processing arm was launched in 2006. Since then use has grown rapidly among general practitioners, and hospital doctors.

Figures from the Ministry of Health show during October 2008, 2887 doctors made applications electronically. Of these, 761 were hospital doctors using a web browser system, while most GPs made applications through practice management software (such as MedTech).

The electronic system cuts the processing time for Special Authority applications from 10 days down to about 17 seconds – while the patient is still with the doctor. The speed and convenience of the system has made it popular, with electronic applications now outstripping manual ones, where doctors fill out a form and fax it to the Ministry.

Ministry of Health figures show in September 2008, there were more than 13,000 applications for Special Authority processed electronically. This compares with just over 10,000 processed manually. September 2008 was the third month in a row when electronic applications outnumbered manual ones, and the gap is growing.

PHARMAC Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie says it's no surprise the electronic system is finding favour.

"The electronic system is faster and more convenient, both for doctor and patient. Processing an application electronically means the patient can leave the doctor's appointment with their prescription and Special Authority number," he says. "And it's clear doctors also have confidence in the system's security, which has been a central part of its design."

"It is encouraging to see the electronic system used by both GPs and hospital doctors. I would expect this is a trend we will see continue into the future."

- To register to use the on-line Special Authority application system please contact the Ministry of Health on 0800 243 666.

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