

Media release

19 March 2009

Once a day, non-stimulant treatment for ADHD funded

PHARMAC has approved funding for a new type of drug to treat behavioural problems in children.

From 1 April 2009 atomoxetine (Strattera) will be funded for people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Available under Special Authority, the drug will be available to people who have not responded to, or who are unable to take, stimulant-type ADHD treatments such as methylphenidate and dexamphetamine.

Atomoxetine is a long-acting treatment for ADHD that has a different therapeutic action than other funded treatments for ADHD, says PHARMAC medical director Dr Peter Moodie. This provides benefits for patients who are not responding to the other ADHD treatments.

“To date the ADHD treatments we have funded have all been stimulant-type drugs. This means they are classed as controlled drugs, so have to be carefully managed. Unfortunately, it also means those drugs are open to abuse and there have been reports in the past of there being a ‘black market’ trade in ADHD treatments,” Dr Moodie says.

“Atomoxetine is a different type of drug, so the risk of it being abused, or given to a person it isn’t prescribed for, is greatly reduced. And the fact it is not a controlled drug has benefits for doctors and pharmacists too.”

For patients, the drug has the added benefit of only having to be taken once a day. Dr Moodie says this helps people to remain stable on their treatment. Some ADHD medicines need to be taken multiple times a day.

Currently about 11,000 people are prescribed ADHD treatments. Dr Moodie says it is difficult to estimate how many of these might be prescribed atomoxetine; however, PHARMAC’s modeling estimates subsidies for around 900 people after three years.

Atomoxetine will be funded as a ‘second line’ treatment for ADHD. This means that people will qualify for funding only after they have tried other types of ADHD treatment first.

Atomoxetine is the second once-a-day ADHD treatment to be funded recently, following the listing of extended release methylphenidate (Concerta) in September 2008.

ENDS

More information: 021 863 342