

Media release, 3 August 2009

New leukaemia treatment funded

PHARMAC is funding a new medication for patients with chronic myeloid leukaemia, called dasatinib (Sprycel).

Chronic myeloid leukaemia (CML) is relatively rare with about 40 new cases diagnosed in New Zealand each year. The only cure is a stem-cell transplant, however treatment was revolutionised with the development of imatinib (Glivec) which enabled people to take a pill at home to control the disease without needing hospital treatment.

However, some people are unable to take Glivec, or their disease becomes resistant to it over time. Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie says PHARMAC recognised that a treatment was needed for those patients, and that is why dasatinib is being funded.

Funding of dasatinib became available under Special Authority from 1 August 2009. Although the price of dasatinib is high, PHARMAC negotiated an agreement with the supplier (Bristol-Myers Squibb) which reduced the overall cost through rebate payments. Details of the agreement are confidential.

“There are about 220 New Zealanders with chronic myeloid leukaemia currently being treated with imatinib. However, some patients become intolerant to that drug and in others their CML disease is no longer controlled by it after a period of treatment,” Dr Moodie says.

“Cancer specialists will now have the option of prescribing dasatinib for their patients. While this drug is generally seen as a second line of treatment to imatinib, the Special Authority does allow dasatinib to also be prescribed as first line treatment.”

“PHARMAC is very pleased to be able to make this drug available in order to give patients with this disease and their doctors a treatment alternative.”

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