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Media release

Newly-funded antidepressant to meet unmet need – PHARMAC

An antidepressant that will be funded from 1 November will help meet an unmet need for people with severe depression, says PHARMAC's medical director Dr Peter Moodie.

Mirtazapine (Avanza) will be funded for people who have tried other types of antidepressants but haven't had an adequate response.

PHARMAC funds 16 antidepressants, of several different types.. However, mirtazapine is a different type of antidepressant to those already funded so may help those people who have not received benefit from other funded treatments, says Dr Moodie.

"There are many different causes and facets of depression and it is a major source of concern in the community," says Dr Moodie. "Our view – and that of our clinical advisory committees – is that a wide range of these treatments is needed. In particular, our clinical advisory committees identified an unmet need in people with severe depression who have failed to respond adequately to currently funded treatment classes."

"Because mirtazapine is a different type of antidepressant, it has a different action on chemicals in the brain to those antidepressants we currently fund. One of the views put to us during consultation was that this could provide benefits for people who have not had a good response to other treatments."

Dr Moodie says because mirtazapine is less expensive than venlafaxine, which is currently the only antidepressant specifically funded for treatment-resistant depression, it is likely to produce savings compared to current antidepressant spending over the next five years.

Mirtazapine adds to the new treatments PHARMAC has funded this year – many of which are made possible through the additional \$40 million of funding provided by the Government.

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