

# Aromatase inhibitors

## – patient information

Recently PHARMAC has made decisions that mean there are changes to the subsidies for some aromatase inhibitors. Aromatase inhibitors are a type of medicine used to treat breast cancer.

PHARMAC currently funds three different types of aromatase inhibitors:

- **letrozole** (brand names Letara and Femara)
- **anastrozole** (brand names DP-Anastrozole and Arimidex)
- **exemestane** (brand name Aromasin).

PHARMAC has received clinical advice from the cancer treatments advisory committee (the members of which are expert oncologists and haematologists) that the three aromatase inhibitors – letrozole, anastrozole and exemestane – have the same or similar therapeutic effect. For that reason, some changes are being made to the funding of some of these medicines to get the best value for money without compromising your health.

The changes in subsidies mean there may be a change to the funding of the brand of medicine you are currently taking but not the active ingredient of your medicine. This information may help answer some questions you may have about these changes.



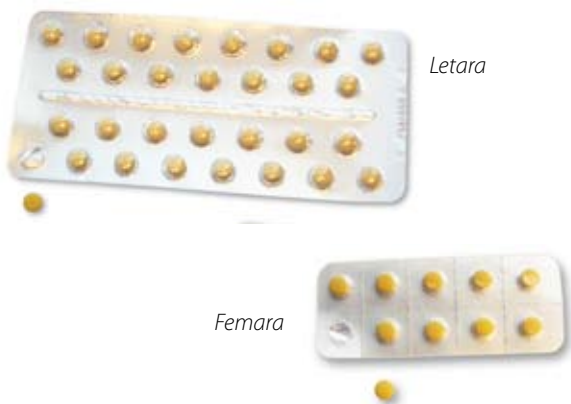
## What are the changes?

While the brand of medicine you are currently taking may no longer be available to you fully subsidised, there will be a fully subsidised option of the medicine for you. It is important to remember that a change in brand will not be a change in the medicine that you are taking.

From 1 February 2010 letrozole and anastrozole will remain fully funded.

## Letrozole

From 1 April 2010 the Femara brand of letrozole will no longer be fully funded and the Letara brand of letrozole will be the fully subsidised brand of letrozole.



Medsafe, the agency that approves medicines for use in New Zealand, has confirmed that Letara and Femara have the same amount of active ingredient (letrozole) in them (they are bioequivalent) which means that they will work the same and you should have the same effect from taking either of these brands.

## Exemestane

From 1 February 2010 exemestane will only remain fully funded for patients who were on this medicine before 1 February 2010 and some other new patients through a new Special Authority. If you are currently taking exemestane, your doctor will need to complete a Special Authority application for you.

## Anastrozole

Two different brands of anastrozole will remain available to you fully funded: DP-Anastrozole and Arimidex. However, PHARMAC cannot guarantee that the Arimidex brand of anastrozole will remain fully subsidised since the price of this product is entirely at the discretion of the supplier. PHARMAC can guarantee that the DP-Anastrozole brand will remain fully funded until at least July 2011.



*Arimidex*

*DP-Anastrozole*



Medsafe, the agency that approves medicines for use in New Zealand, has confirmed that Arimidex and DP-Anastrozole have the same amount of active ingredient (anastrozole) in them (they are bioequivalent) which means that they will work the same and you should have the same effect from taking either of these brands.

### **Will the changes mean an extra cost to me?**

No.

Other than the usual patient co-payment, there will be no extra cost for you, but the brand of the medicine you are taking may change.

If you specifically wish to be treated with the Femara brand of letrozole you will have to pay a part charge from 1 April 2010 and the full cost from 1 July 2010. PHARMAC cannot guarantee the ongoing supply of Femara after 1 July 2010.

If you are currently taking exemestane it will remain fully funded for you through a new Special Authority. You will need to have your doctor complete a Special Authority application for you.

## **Will Arimidex continue to be available after 1 February 2010?**

PHARMAC cannot guarantee whether the Arimidex brand of anastrozole will remain available or what the cost will be. It is the pharmaceutical supplier of Arimidex (AstraZeneca) who decides whether it will still be available. The DP-Anastrozole brand of anastrozole will remain fully funded until at least July 2011.

## **Will Femara be available after 1 April 2010?**

PHARMAC cannot guarantee whether the Femara brand of letrozole will still be available or what the cost will be. It is the pharmaceutical supplier of Femara (Novartis) who decides whether it will still be available. The Letara brand of letrozole will remain fully funded until at least July 2012.

## **Where can I get more information?**

Please phone the PHARMAC helpline, **0800 66 00 50** (between 9 am and 4 pm weekdays). You can also e-mail [brandswitch@pharmac.govt.nz](mailto:brandswitch@pharmac.govt.nz) with your queries and/or comments.

We also recommend that if you have any concerns about your medicine and your treatment options that you discuss these directly with your doctor. Your pharmacist will also help guide you through any changes you may decide to make.