

22 August 2010

Media release

## **Open access to blood-thinning drug for heart patients**

The heart drug clopidogrel is to have open access from next month, following a major price reduction negotiated by PHARMAC.

Clopidogrel thins the blood, so is an important treatment for people who have had, or are at risk of, heart attack and stroke. Clopidogrel is currently funded for people with acute coronary syndrome, those who have had stents inserted to open blocked arteries and for people who are allergic to aspirin.

Now, following a significant price reduction through a PHARMAC tender, and the injection of new pharmaceutical funding from the Government, Special Authority restrictions are being lifted from clopidogrel, meaning it can be prescribed for any patient for whom doctors consider it appropriate.

Originally funded at a cost of \$168 for a month's treatment, clopidogrel will now cost taxpayers just \$5.05 a month – a reduction of more than 95%. The price reduction is the result of a competitive process run by PHARMAC.

Medical Director Peter Moodie says access widening will be welcomed by cardiologists and GPs.

“This is another useful tool for managing people who have had cardiac problems,” says Dr Moodie. “Blood-thinning drugs are important for enabling people to return to their lives after heart surgery, and clopidogrel is a useful option to have available. Making it more widely available gives clinicians more choice and will potentially benefit a larger group of patients.”

Three brands of clopidogrel are currently funded – Apo-clopidogrel, Arrow-clopidogrel, and Plavix; however from 1 November 2010, only the Apo-clopidogrel brand will be fully funded.

PHARMAC predicts the number of people taking clopidogrel will double to around 50,000 within three years. Even with the price reduction, widening access is expected to require nearly \$6 million of additional spending over the next five years.

ENDS

More information: 021 863 342