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Media release

Two newly funded treatments for prostate diseases

PHARMAC is to begin funding treatments for two types of prostate disease in men – prostate cancer and benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

From 1 October, finasteride (Fintral) will be funded for BPH, and from 1 November bicalutamide (Bicalox) will be funded for advanced prostate cancer.

Both prostate cancer and BPH are relatively common, particularly in men aged over 50. Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in New Zealand men and the third most common cause of male cancer deaths. Prostate cancer accounts for 3.8% of all male deaths in New Zealand; about three quarters of these deaths occur amongst men aged 75 years and older.

BPH is the most prevalent urological disease in men, and causes an enlarged prostate that can lead to very debilitating and painful symptoms for patients.

PHARMAC's Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie says: "Both these decisions introduce new funded treatments that increase the range of funded treatment options. We know that not everyone responds to all the current medication for various reasons, so increasing the options is a step forward for patients and doctors."

Both bicalutamide and finasteride are off-patent drugs that have been sourced through the PHARMAC tender at very competitive prices, says Dr Moodie. The price negotiated for bicalutamide, for example, is a tenth of that currently paid in the UK.

Bicalutamide is being funded under Special Authority for advanced prostate cancer. PHARMAC estimates that it could be used by about 160 people in the first year, rising to more than 300 by 2011.

Finasteride is being listed under Special Authority for men who are unable to be successfully treated with another group of drugs called alpha blockers. Up to 3000 men could be treated with finasteride each year, says Dr Moodie.

ENDS

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