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Media release

PHARMAC's Consultation on Exceptional Circumstances

PHARMAC is seeking feedback on proposed changes to its Exceptional Circumstances policy.

Currently the three exceptional circumstances schemes provide pharmaceutical funding consideration for patients in rare or unusual medical situations, where there are cost-savings to hospitals and for cancer patients in certain circumstances.

The first phase of PHARMAC's review of Exceptional Circumstances, announced by Health Minister Tony Ryall in August 2010, involved seeking the views of interested parties on how the policy could be improved.

PHARMAC received more than 70 responses from a broad range of stakeholders, which have informed the proposals described in the current consultation document.

The proposed new single scheme - Named Patient Pharmaceutical Assessment - would provide fairer and wider consideration for more patients to receive funded access to pharmaceuticals not considered for listing on the Pharmaceutical Schedule. This would include explicit consideration for patients with severe and/or life threatening conditions.

A clearer application process, better information about decisions, and a trial of an exemption for DHBs from applying for approval to fund community treatments under \$500 are additional features of the proposal that would improve the ease of use for clinicians who apply on a patient's behalf.

Chief Executive Matthew Brougham says the suggested approach reflects a number of improvements that stakeholders were seeking, but now wants to hear stakeholders' views on the proposal.

"Gaining the views of clinicians who will be working with the scheme, consumers with an interest in access to treatments and any other interested parties is crucial," says Matthew Brougham. "We will take all the information we receive into account when making final decisions on changes to Exceptional Circumstances."

In addition to seeking written submissions, PHARMAC will be meeting with interested parties to hear views on the proposal face-to-face. Consultation closes on Friday 25 March.

Recommendations on changes to Exceptional Circumstances policy will be presented to the PHARMAC Board in June 2011.

More information about PHARMAC's review and how interested parties can be involved is available online at <http://www.pharmac.govt.nz/ecreview>.

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