



## PHARMAC welcomes debate

As an agency responsible for allocating New Zealand taxpayer funding, PHARMAC should be open to scrutiny (<http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/118-1217/1544/>). Criticism can be uncomfortable, but things need to be said, and the NZMJ's 'Special Series' does so.

The *Journal* has an important role in healthcare in New Zealand, and we appreciate the *Journal's* efforts to promote local content.<sup>1</sup> Debate about PHARMAC's operations forms a necessary part of that content. We will seek to respond in order to maintain a balanced and constructive debate, because we believe that ultimately such debate can enhance healthcare in New Zealand.

From our discussions with the *Journal's* editors we understood that the 'Special Series' would include a series of ten articles highlighting how PHARMAC adversely affects population health through restricting the availability of certain medications.<sup>2</sup> We were also told that the *Journal* intended to allow PHARMAC the right of reply, but as a single response to all the articles and one-off at the end of the series. We thought this unfair.

In the past the *Journal* has provided PHARMAC with the chance to respond to a viewpoint article<sup>3</sup> in a timely manner,<sup>4</sup> and we have appreciated this. We felt disappointed not to be given a similar opportunity to respond in a similar way to the articles making recent direct criticisms.<sup>2,5-7</sup>

We are happy to debate funding issues in the *Journal*, particularly when all the evidence is presented. We will work to keep the debates informative and interesting, so that the sector has a deeper understanding of the roles and practices of PHARMAC—and increase the reading of other important issues that the *Journal* raises.<sup>8,9</sup>

**Conflict of interest:** Scott Metcalfe is externally contracted to work with PHARMAC for public health advice. Peter Moodie and Wayne McNee declare no conflicts.

Peter Moodie

Medical Director, PHARMAC, Wellington

Wayne McNee

Chief Executive, PHARMAC, Wellington

Scott Metcalfe

Public Health Physician, Wellington

## References:

1. Frizelle F. Continuous reassessment, and hopefully improvement. *N Z Med J.* 2003;116:1168. URL: <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/116-1168/293/>
2. Holt S, Harwood M, Aldington S, Beasley R. PHARMAC and tobacco control in New Zealand: Government policy 'up in smoke'. *NZ Med J.* 2005;118:1502. URL: <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/118-1216/1502/>

3. Begg E, Sidwell A, Gardiner S, et al. The sorry saga of the statins in New Zealand—pharmacopolitics versus patient care. N Z Med J. 2003;116(1170). URL: <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/116-1170/360>
4. Moodie P, Metcalfe S, McNee W. Response from PHARMAC: difficult choices. N Z Med J. 2003;116(1170). URL: <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/116-1170/361/>
5. MacKay P. Is PHARMAC's sole-supply tendering policy harming the health of New Zealanders? N Z Med J. 2005;118(1214). URL: <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/118-1214/1433/>
6. Moodie P, McNee W. PHARMAC responds to the RMI's editorial. N Z Med J 2005;118(1217). URL: <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/118-1217/1527/>
7. Metcalfe S, Moodie P, McNee W. PHARMAC and tobacco control in New Zealand: two licensed funded options are already available (with responses by Holt et al and the Editor). N Z Med J. 2005;118(1217). URL: <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/118-1217/1544/>
8. Snape L. Angry young men, interpersonal violence, alcohol, and broken faces. N Z Med J. 2005;118(1217). URL: <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/118-1217/1534/>
9. Milne R. Valuing prevention: discounting health benefits and costs in New Zealand. N Z Med J. 2005;118(1214). URL: <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/118-1214/1443/>