



Hundreds of New Zealanders to benefit from PHARMAC funding for cancer medicine

News release

Tuesday, 16 June 2009

For immediate release

New Zealanders diagnosed with indolent (low grade) non Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL) now have expanded funding for a cutting edge biotherapy, MabThera® (rituximab), increasing their chances of beating this slowly progressing but often fatal disease.

Today PHARMAC announced that, from July 1, it will be fully funding MabThera for the first line treatment of indolent lymphoma.¹ Prior to this decision, funding for MabThera was restricted to patients who had already been treated with chemotherapy and whose cancer had returned (relapsed).²

Peter Browett, Medical Director for the Leukaemia and Blood Foundation, says more than 200 people each year will benefit from the extended funding criteria, increasing both the length and quality of their lives.

"MabThera is an important breakthrough in the treatment of indolent lymphoma and a large step forward in the way we treat this disease in New Zealand. Full PHARMAC funding means that we will be able to treat a large group of patients who previously were not able to be treated until their disease progressed."

Professor Browett says indolent lymphomas are slow growing forms of the disease with recent studies showing that MabThera added to chemotherapy significantly prolongs the life of patients with follicular lymphoma, the most common form of indolent NHL, when compared to chemotherapy alone.

"MabThera plus chemotherapy offers better responses and longer symptom-free periods than chemotherapy alone. MabThera is a very valuable tool and we're happy that we now have the option to treat patients with this combination of therapies."

MabThera is already funded for the first-line treatment of aggressive NHL, a faster growing form of the disease, in combination with chemotherapy.²

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About MabThera

MabThera is a therapeutic antibody that binds to a particular protein - the CD20 antigen - on the surface of normal and malignant B-cells. It then recruits the body's natural defences to attack and kill the marked B-cells. Stem cells (B-cell progenitors) in bone marrow lack the CD20 antigen, allowing healthy B-cells to regenerate after treatment and return to normal levels within several months.

About Roche

Roche Products (New Zealand) Limited is committed to providing innovative, high quality medicines for use in New Zealand. Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Roche is one of the world's leading research-focused healthcare groups in the fields of pharmaceuticals and diagnostics. As the world's biggest biotech company and an innovator of products and services for the early detection, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases, the Group contributes on a broad range of fronts to improving people's health and quality of life. Roche is the world leader in in-vitro diagnostics and drugs for cancer and transplantation, and is a market leader in virology. It is also active in other major therapeutic areas such as autoimmune diseases, inflammatory and metabolic disorders and diseases of the central nervous system. Roche has R&D agreements and strategic alliances with numerous partners, including majority ownership interests in Genentech and Chugai, and invested over 8 billion Swiss francs in R&D in 2007. Worldwide, the Group employs about 79,000 people. Additional information is available on the Internet at www.roche.co.nz.

What you should know about MabThera

MabThera® (rituximab) is a Prescription Medicine used to treat non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (a type of blood cancer).

MabThera should not be used if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Tell your doctor if you have any other health problems including: heart disease, certain blood disorders (e.g. low white blood cells or platelets), hepatitis B, or lung disease, or have had any immunisation recently.

Possible unwanted effects include: *Common:* fever, chills and severe shivering; nausea; fatigue; headache; runny nose; pain where the lymphoma is located; drop in blood pressure; flushing; pain at site of infusion. *Rare (serious):* severe skin rash, itching, hives; severe swelling of the face, lips, mouth, throat, hands, feet or ankles; severe shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, wheezing or coughing; frequent infections; numbness of the face; severe vision or hearing loss.

Ask your doctor if MabThera is right for you. Use strictly as directed. If symptoms continue or you experience side effects or would like further information please talk to your doctor or pharmacist or visit www.medsafe.govt.nz for MabThera Consumer Medicine Information. MabThera (100 mg/10 mL and 500 mg/50 mL single use vials) is a funded medicine under Special Authority for patients who meet pre-defined criteria. A prescription charge and normal doctor's fees may apply.



TAPS Approval NA 3520

¹ PHARMAC media release. <http://www.pharmac.govt.nz/patients/media>. Last viewed 15.06.09

² http://www.pharmac.govt.nz/patients/Schedule/SAForms_Form_SAO884. Last viewed 11.06.09