

Adrienne Martin,  
Senior Therapeutic Group Manager/ Team Leader  
PHARMAC  
Level 9, 40 Mercer Street  
Wellington  
6<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Copies to Sarah Fitt (CEO) and Lisa Williams (Director of Operations)

Dear Adrienne,

We write on behalf of Multiple Sclerosis New Zealand to request your action in addressing the urgent needs of Multiple Sclerosis Specialists and those diagnosed at this unprecedented time.

We are aware that Dr Mason has written to you requesting the extension of all patients Special Authorities at their anniversary date by 12 months, with a telephone follow up. Multiple Sclerosis New Zealand supports this request and requests that Pharmac reconsider its response.

As you will be aware Neurologists, along with the rest of the health system, is under immense pressure and all non-essential face to face appointments have been cancelled. MSNZ has previously highlighted to you our position, that the application and MSTAC review process put in place is time consuming and does not take into consideration the expertise of New Zealand Neurologists, and the resourcing constraints they are under, even pre-COVID.

We are concerned about the added stress that Annual Reviews will put on patients who, at this time, are already anxious about isolation and the uncertainties of how MS and COVID-19 interact. Annual Reviews add an unnecessary pressure. We regularly hear from people with MS about the stress Annual Reviews put them under. This stress can often mean their results are worse than they would be on a normal day.

Neurologists in New Zealand, Australia and globally all recommend at this time staying on treatment as there is a very real risk of rebound relapse if treatment is discontinued. The impact of these relapses can be incredibly harmful and irreversible.

Considering all this, along with the fact that PTAC recommended with high priority at their November 2019 meeting to widen the access criteria for MS treatments from 0-5.5, and with all treatments stopped by 6, we request Pharmac make the following changes to the Special Authority for MS Treatments:

- 1) All applications due for repeat Special Authority during Alert Levels 2-4 be extended for a 12-month period on the proviso that a tele-appointment is held to confirm no major adverse changes in the persons health. MRIs and relevant health tests to be completed at the earliest opportunity but this may be after the renewal if they cannot be completed before.
- 2) Pharmac fund with urgency the PTAC recommendations to widen the access criteria for MS treatments as approved at the November 2019 meeting.

Considering PTAC have made a high priority recommendation for widening the access, under the newly proposed criteria, there would be very few patients who would become ineligible for treatment during this period.

Patients on intravenous therapies will regularly be seen by infusion clinics who can report to the Neurologists and concerns.

We urge you to action these recommendations with immediacy as the health system is currently overburdened and struggling to manage the current load of Special Authorities. This backlog will only get worse.

We await your response.

Yours sincerely,



Amanda Rose  
National Manager



Neil Woodhams  
Vice President