



NEW ZEALAND DERMATOLOGICAL SOCIETY INCORPORATED

Media release

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DERMATOLOGISTS WARNING OVER NEW RULES FOR ACNE DRUG

New Zealand and Australian dermatologists are united in their criticism of PHARMAC's decision to widen prescribing rights for two medicines used to treat severe skin conditions.

The New Zealand Dermatological Society and The Australasian College of Dermatologists are worried that the current, stringent, safety measures will not be upheld if the drugs are more easily prescribed.

Isotretinoin (commonly known as Roaccutane® and more recently as Isotane) and acitretin are potentially dangerous medicines, used for the treatment of acne, psoriasis and other skin problems.

The drugs can have serious side effects, including an increased risk of birth defects if taken during or before pregnancy (teratogenicity). For this reason, they have only previously been subsidised when prescribed by a specialist dermatologist.

PHARMAC's decision means that from March next year General Practitioners and nurse practitioners will be able to prescribe these medicines on a subsidised basis provided they have training and receive special authority from PHARMAC.

President of The New Zealand Dermatological Society Dr Liz Baird says, due to the severity of the potential side effects local dermatologists have been conservative in the prescription of this medication.

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“We know the potential damage that could be caused during a pregnancy would be devastating so we have been extremely vigilant in ensuring our clients are fully informed of the importance of avoiding pregnancy while on these medications,” says Dr Baird.

The New Zealand Dermatological Society and The Australasian College of Dermatologists agree with PHARMAC’s acknowledgement that these medicines are potentially dangerous and require special precautions to ensure they are prescribed and used safely. However, only dermatologists have specialist training in the treatment of skin conditions, and extensive experience in prescribing these medicines.

The New Zealand Dermatological Society and The Australasian College of Dermatologists will be monitoring the training given to general practitioners who wish to prescribe these medicines, to make sure they continue to be used safely and appropriately.

Isotretinoin is a vitamin A derivative, which has been available for over two decades to treat severe nodulocystic acne not responding to conventional treatment.

Severe acne is a difficult condition to treat and its therapy requires significant training, particularly with regard to the use of isotretinoin. This is a medication that has many dermatological side effects which often need to be separately managed during the course of treatment.

In Australia and the United Kingdom both medicines are still strictly specialist only. The United States has also recently tightened up prescription of isotretinoin with the iPledge programme – where close monitoring of patients is undertaken.

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Written on behalf of The New Zealand Dermatological Society Incorporated by Impact PR. For further information or images, please contact Fleur Revell-Devlin fleur@impactpr.co.nz (ph. 021509600) or Mark Devlin, mark@impactpr.co.nz (ph. 021509060).

Notes to editors:

The New Zealand Dermatological Society Inc:

The New Zealand Dermatological Society Inc. is a non profit, professional society of dermatologists which aims to support and promote dermatology and to provide an authoritative body of opinion on matters of the skin. The society represents all dermatologists in New Zealand and provides continuing professional development and scientific meetings for its members as well as providing a voice for dermatologists in discussion with Government and affiliated health services.

The society accepts as members only dermatologists that are vocationally registered with the New Zealand Medical Council. Dermatologists are the medical and surgical skin specialists and usually have completed at least four to six years of study in dermatology.

Dr Elizabeth A. Baird, MB ChB, FRACP, Dip GU Med (Lond)

Dr Baird is a UK graduate who moved to New Zealand in 1985. She completed her dermatology training in New Zealand and Scotland and has been practicing clinical dermatology in Auckland for the past 16 years.

Dr Baird's special interests are in the treatment of acne, eczema and management of skin cancer. Dr Baird is the current president of The New Zealand Dermatological Society and is a Fellow at the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and American Academy of Dermatology. She is also a member of the DermNet Education Group.