

ONTARIO IMPROVES ACCESS TO DRUGS

December 3, 2008

The Ontario government is investing \$20 million annually to add six drugs to those products covered under the Ontario Public Drug Programs.

The six drugs now covered are:

1. Lantus

Lantus is an extended, long-acting insulin used to lower blood glucose levels in people with diabetes by releasing it slowly and gradually into the bloodstream. It takes about 90 minutes to begin working after injection, and works for about 24 hours.

Lantus is being added to the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Formulary; there are 25 other insulins and 75 oral diabetic drug products already covered on the ODB Formulary.

2. Vectibix

Vectibix is a new intravenous drug used for metastatic colorectal cancer patients when standard chemotherapy treatment has been unsuccessful. Metastatic colorectal cancer is cancer that has spread from the colon or rectum to other parts of the body such as the liver, lungs or bones.

Vectibix binds to a protein known as epidermal growth factor receptor on the surface of cancer cells. The drug prevents the cancer cell from receiving the message to grow and divide.

Ontarians who previously went out-of-country to receive Erbitux will benefit from this new drug. This will give many Ontarians easier access to alternative treatments.

Before being treated with Vectibix, patients will be tested for the *KRAS* gene mutation since only patients without this gene mutation benefit from the drug.

Vectibix is being added to the ministry/Cancer Care Ontario's New Drug Funding Program.

3. Rasilez

Rasilez is used for the treatment of hypertension. It reduces blood pressure by blocking the actions of a chemical (renin) that cause blood vessels to constrict or tighten. Rasilez is being added to the ODB Formulary.

4. Oencia

Oencia is used for the treatment of moderate-to-severe rheumatoid arthritis. For people with rheumatoid arthritis, the immune system attacks normal tissues in the joints, causing pain, inflammation and damage. Oencia helps to decrease the immune system's attack on normal tissues.

It's being considered through the Exceptional Access Program (EAP) for patients who have failed to respond to anti-rheumatic medications listed in the ODB Formulary and two anti-tumour necrosis factor agents funded through EAP.

5. Raptiva

Raptiva is used for the treatment of severe plaque psoriasis. It's being covered on the ODB Formulary for patients 18 years and older who have failed to respond to several standard therapies (including topical agents, steroids and phototherapy); other ODB patients may continue to have funding considered through the EAP. Raptiva, which is injected, works by decreasing the activity of parts of the immune system that are believed to be involved in psoriasis.

6. Enbrel

Enbrel is used for the treatment of severe plaque psoriasis. It's being covered on the ODB Formulary for patients 18 years and older who have failed to respond to several standard therapies (including topical agents, steroids and phototherapy); other ODB patients may continue to have funding considered through the EAP. Enbrel, which is injected, blocks the production of a protein called tumour necrosis factor that can cause the inflammation in the joints and on the skin.

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