

August 15, 2007

Honourable Michael Murphy
Carleton Place
P. O. Box 5100
Fredericton, NB
E3B 5G8

Sent via email to:
hw_sme@gnb.ca
Original mailed

Dear Minister Murphy:

In an effort to work collaboratively with government we, as representatives of Arthritis Consumer Experts and Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance, are writing to bring your attention to the June 20, 2007 Canadian Expert Drug Advisory Committee's (CEDAC) recommendation that abatacept (Orencia®) be added to provincial drug reimbursement lists for people with severely active rheumatoid arthritis.

This new biologic works in an entirely different way than the ones currently listed on your provincial drug reimbursement lists. Abatacept blocks the activation of T-cells, a specific type of immune cell that is found in the joints of persons with rheumatoid arthritis and is important in the development of inflammation and subsequent joint damage. This is important because through research we know that the disease involves a number of different molecules that cause or promote the inflammatory process of rheumatoid arthritis – the one symptom that is so devastating and damaging in rheumatoid arthritis. Moreover, research shows that there continues to be a significant unmet need for new treatments. Approximately 60% of people with rheumatoid arthritis who have tried one or several of the biologic response modifiers currently on the market have not responded well (or responded well enough) to them. In other words, more than half of people with inflammatory arthritis do not have their symptoms alleviated with the current biologics.

For the above reasons and in light of the CEDAC recommendation and your support for the Common Drug Review process, we urge you, as Minister of Health, to take the necessary steps to list abatacept on the provincial drug reimbursement lists. We remind you that this therapy is intended to treat citizens of New Brunswick with severe rheumatoid arthritis who have had an inadequate response to an anti-TNF agent. At present, no effective treatment options are available for these individuals. Ensuring timely access to medications will serve to ensure that people in New Brunswick living with rheumatoid arthritis will have critical treatment options that will reduce the pain, deformity and work disability associated with delayed treatment. In addition, access to these medications will improve quality of life, allowing people with rheumatoid arthritis to fully participate in their families, communities and society.

Arthritis Consumer Experts and the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance make this request on behalf of its community members affected by rheumatoid arthritis.

We thank you in advance for considering our request, and await word from you on the listing decision for abatacept.

Sincerely,



Linda Wilhelm
NB Steering Committee Representative
Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance
Person with rheumatoid arthritis



Cheryl Koehn
President, Arthritis Consumer Experts
Person with rheumatoid arthritis

Encl.

C.c. Leanne Jardine, Acting Director, New Brunswick Prescription Drug Program

Note: Please address reply correspondence to Ms. Cheryl Koehn, Arthritis Consumer Experts, 910 B Richards Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 3C1.