

August 15, 2007

Honourable Brad Cathers
Yukon Legislative Assembly
Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2C6

Sent via email to:
brad.cathers@gov.yk.ca
Original mailed

Dear Minister Cathers:

In an effort to work collaboratively with government, Arthritis Consumer Experts, the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance and The Arthritis Society BC/Yukon Division are writing to bring your attention to the June 27, 2007 Common Drug Review's **Canadian Expert Drug Advisory Committee (CEDAC) recommendation that abatacept (Orencia®), in combination with a disease modifying anti-rheumatic drug (DMARD), be added to provincial drug benefit plans for people with severely active rheumatoid arthritis who have failed on an anti-tumour necrosis factor ("anti-TNF") therapy. (See attached CEDAC recommendation.)**

As noted in our letter of December 18, 2007, abatacept's mechanism of action is entirely new in comparison to other biologic response modifiers currently listed on the territorial drug benefit plan. This new medication works by interfering with T-cells that promote inflammation, making them inactive and unable to cause the hallmark outcomes of rheumatoid arthritis – joint destruction and long term disability. This new medication is an important one to include on the drug benefit plan as the research is conclusive that numerous different molecules – like in HIV/AIDS and cancer – cause and promote the disease. And just like in HIV/AIDS, it is a cocktail of medication treatments that help as much as possible to restore the normal immune function of the person living with rheumatoid arthritis. No two people living with rheumatoid arthritis respond to the same cocktail of medications.

For the above reasons, and in light of the CEDAC recommendation and your strong support for the Common Drug Review process, we urge you, as Minister of Health, **to take the immediate necessary steps to list abatacept on the territorial drug benefit plan.** We remind you that this therapy is intended to treat citizens of the Yukon with moderate to severe rheumatoid arthritis who did not respond to an anti-TNF therapy. At present, no effective treatment options are available for these individuals. Providing a timely reimbursement listing for this medication will ensure that people living with rheumatoid arthritis in the Yukon will have critical treatment options that will reduce the pain, deformity and work disability associated with delayed treatment.

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

Sincerely,



Cheryl Koehn
President
Arthritis Consumer Experts
Person with rheumatoid arthritis



Ron Woznow, PhD
Executive Director
The Arthritis Society,
BC and Yukon Division



Anne Dooley
President
Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance
Person with rheumatoid arthritis

Encl.

C.c. Dianne Tait, Manager, Extended Benefits and Pharmaceutical Programs

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