December 19, 2007

Dear Minister Currie:

As members of Arthritis Consumer Experts and the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance we are writing to re-draw your attention to a critical issue facing almost 700 Prince Edward Islanders living with ankylosing spondylitis – the complete lack of availability of biologic medications on the provincial drug reimbursement formulary.

We wrote to you on September 10, 2007, informing you of the Canadian Expert Drug Advisory Committee (CEDAC) recommendation that adalimumab (Humira®) be added to provincial drug benefit plans for people with active ankylosing spondylitis who meet the criteria. Yet, to date, there has still not been a listing decision on this or either of the other two biologic medications on the market and approved for use in this disease. To date Prince Edward Island is falling behind Ontario, New Brunswick, Quebec and other provinces that have listed biologics for the treatment of ankylosing spondylitis. This unnecessary delay and discrepancy in care is unacceptable to the arthritis community in Prince Edward Island and should be to the Government of Prince Edward Island, too.

The inclusion of biologic response modifiers is central to improving and maintaining the health of Prince Edward Islanders living with ankylosing spondylitis. There is irrefutable evidence supporting the use of biologic response modifiers for the treatment and management of ankylosing spondylitis. For example, as clearly outlined in the CEDAC recommendation, adalimumab not only “resulted in significantly more patients achieving ASAS 20, 50 and 70 after 12 weeks of treatment” but also improved quality of life, reduced disease activity and was shown to be cost effective. The evidence in support of the other two biologics on the market that are also in this class is almost identical to that of this specific medication. This shows that in addition to the personal health benefits that emerge from appropriate treatment for this disease, there are significant social, political, and economic benefits for government.

It is important to recognize that the economic impact of not providing these medications is far greater than the cost of providing them. The consequences of un-treated or under-treated ankylosing spondylitis, such as spinal rigidity, increased risk of fractures and other joint problems, are irreversible and result in higher use of health services and work disability.\(^3\)

Given the strong scientific evidence, we urge you, as Minister of Health, **to take the immediate necessary steps list all three medications that make up the class of biologic response modifiers on the provincial drug benefit plan for people with ankylosing spondylitis.** Providing a timely reimbursement listing for this medication will ensure that Prince Edward Islanders living with ankylosing spondylitis are able to reduce the pain and disability associated with delayed treatment, improve their quality of life and have the same care and treatment options as people who live in other provinces in Canada.

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

Sincerely,

Colleen Murray  
PEI Steering Committee Representative  
Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance  
Person with rheumatoid arthritis  

Cheryl Koehn  
President, Arthritis Consumer Experts  
Person with rheumatoid arthritis  

C.c. Patrick Crawford, pharmacy consultant

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