

The latest on Thyroxine – Low Thyroide function

Low thyroid function is a common TS symptom, and many of us rely on thyroxine to increase our thyroid levels. There was a story on Close Up about some negative side effects of a new brand used by PHARMAC. If you missed the report re: thyroxine, you can see it at www.tvnz.co.nz, under Close Up.

There has been much interest in the thyroxine supplied by PHARMAC (who are the government agency that subsidises medications). From what I understand PHARMAC has changed supplier of thyroxine (basically from one brand to another) and it appears that for some reason some people have experienced side effects when the brand changed. Unless you have experienced side effects from the current thyroxine there is likely no need for concern. Any drug side effects should be discussed with your doctor / pharmacist.

PHARMAC reports on their website, www.pharmac.govt.nz, that:

“If your medication has changed, it usually means that another supplier has successfully bid for the supply contract or the previous supplier has withdrawn from the New Zealand market.”

If you find yourself in this situation, there are a number of options open to you:

- If your former brand of medication is still available you could buy it at your own cost.
- If your former medication is no longer for sale in New Zealand, your doctor or pharmacist may be able to import the drug under Section 29 of the Medicines Act, again without subsidy.
- You could apply to have your former medication subsidised by the Exceptional Circumstances Panel. Certain criteria must be met to qualify for Exceptional Circumstances approval. See the ‘Exceptional Circumstances’ section of the PHARMAC website for more details. <http://www.pharmac.govt.nz/EC>

The latest I have found is straight from the horses' mouth – via a media release 30 September 2008. This is edited from the PHARMAC website:

PHARMAC begins consultation on alternative thyroid treatment

PHARMAC has begun consultation on a proposal to subsidise a further brand of the thyroid treatment levothyroxine. Consultation is a further step towards introducing an alternative to the Eltroxin brand that is currently funded. PHARMAC medical director Dr Peter Moodie says the proposal affects pharmaceutical companies, doctors, pharmacists and patients so it is important there is an opportunity for people to give their views of the proposal.

Levothyroxine (also known as thyroxine) is widely used in New Zealand with approximately 70,000 patients prescribed it. The proposal involves the listing of the Goldshield brand of levothyroxine, which would be supplied in New Zealand. The Goldshield brand is widely used in the United Kingdom, from where stocks will originate. Dr Moodie says that usually there would be a 4 to 5 month lead-in time for a new pharmaceutical to be available, because of manufacturing, shipping and other issues. However, PHARMAC has made a particular effort to ensure an advance shipment of Goldshield is available sooner, from early November.

For the full media release see:

http://www.pharmac.govt.nz/2008/09/30/Goldshield_provisional_agreement_release.pdf

For those of us on thyroxine, and in fact any medications, we need to be aware of what the potential side effects are, and of course see your doctor or pharmacist if you are concerned. My advice is to continue taking your prescription medication, as prescribed, until you have got medical advice.

Sally