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MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW PBS MEDICINES LISTED – APRIL 2009

Older women with osteoporosis, children with tyrosinemia and people with restless legs syndrome will benefit from the additions and changes to medicines subsidised by the Australian Government on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

In coming years more than 21,000 older women with osteoporosis are expected to benefit from the addition of zoledronic acid (Aclasta®) to the PBS. The once-a-year injection will be available for women over 70 years with a bone mineral density score of -3.0 or less.

This is the third treatment option available under the PBS for osteoporosis and recognises the growing number of people, especially older women, with the condition. According to Osteoporosis Australia, someone is admitted to an Australian hospital with an osteoporotic fracture every eight minutes.

The listing of zoledronic acid will add about \$20 million to the PBS over the next five years.

Children aged 1-10 years with tyrosinemia will benefit from the listing of amino acid formula with vitamins and minerals without phenylalanine (*PKU Anamix Junior LQ®* and *Lophlex LQ 10®*). Tyrosinemia is an inherited disorder of amino acid metabolism that causes liver disease and is treated with a diet low in the amino acid tyrosine.

There are no expected cost implications for the PBS as this medication will be a substitute for other PBS medications.

Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a neurological disorder characterised by unpleasant sensations in the legs and an uncontrollable urge to move when at rest in an effort to relieve these feelings.

The listing of pramipexole hydrochloride (Sifrol®) on the PBS has been extended to include treatment of severe primary RLS, and is expected to benefit more than 25,000 patients over the next five years. This will add about \$18 million to the PBS over the next five years.

A variety of additional treatments for existing medications will now be subsidised through the PBS.

An oral solution of escitalopram oxalate (Lexapro®) will provide an additional treatment method for people with moderate to severe generalised anxiety disorder

and social anxiety disorder. There are no expected cost implications for the PBS as this will substitute existing PBS medications.

A new formulation for desmopressin acetate (Minirin Melt®) as a wafer put under the tongue will provide an additional treatment method for primary nocturnal enuresis (bed-wetting). There are no expected cost implications for the PBS as this will substitute other medications.

Cancer is Australia's largest burden of disease, and more than 100,000 people are diagnosed with it every year.

A new solution concentrate for an in vitro infusion of gemcitabine hydrochloride (Gemcitabine Ebewe®) has been added to the PBS to treat a variety of cancer conditions, including breast cancer, epithelial ovarian cancer, non-small cell lung cancer and bladder cancer. There are no expected cost implications for the PBS as this medication will substitute for different forms of the same strengths of the same medication.

Two additional strengths of oxycodone hydrochloride (OxyContin®) tablets will be added to the PBS for the management of moderate to severe chronic pain that is unresponsive to non-narcotic analgesia. This listing will provide patients with increased convenience. There are no expected cost implications for the PBS as this will substitute for other forms of this PBS medication.

The listing of ziprasidone hydrochloride (Zeldox®) has been extended to include monotherapy, for up to six months, of an episode of acute mania or mixed episodes associated with bipolar I disorder. There are no expected cost implications for the PBS as this will substitute for other PBS medications.

Changes to the Highly Specialised Drugs Program from 1 April 2009 will broaden the subsidised use of filgrastim (Neupogen®) and pegfilgrastim (Neulasta®) to assist some people with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia is the most common form of leukaemia in Western countries and occurs primarily in older people, with men twice as likely to develop the condition.

The changes will cover patients being treated with fludarabine and cyclophosphamide who have secondary prophylaxis of neutropenia or prolonged severe neutropenia. This will assist more than 900 patients over the next five years.

Neutropenia is a condition of an abnormally low number of a particular type of white blood cell neutrophil. Treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy can cause neutropenia.

The extension of filgrastim and pegfilgrastim will add about \$15.4 million to the PBS over the next five years.

People who have had a stroke and have moderate to severe spasticity of the upper limb will benefit from the extension of botulinum toxin type A (Botox®). According to the National Stroke Foundation, Australians will suffer around 60,000 new and recurrent strokes this year alone.

This treatment will be available as second line therapy when standard management has failed, or as an adjunct to physical therapy. There are no expected cost implications for the PBS as this will replace as existing therapy.

For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220.