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MEDIA RELEASE

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New Government-Subsidised Medicines: PBS Listings

From today patients with hypertension will benefit from increased treatment options, as a result of new PBS listings and new medication strengths.

Hypertension, another name for high blood pressure, affects around 15 per cent of all Australians. It is more common in patients with a family history of hypertension, and in the older population, occurring at a rate of 40-50 per cent in patients aged 70 years and older. Heart attacks and strokes can result if hypertension is untreated, due to damage in the blood vessels of the heart and brain. Where lifestyle modification is ineffective, medicines can reduce blood pressure to healthy levels.

Amlodipine with valsartan (Exforge[®]) is now available for patients with hypertension who are not adequately controlled with either amlodipine or valsartan monotherapy, in the following tablet strengths: 5/80 mg, 5/160 mg, and 10/160 mg.

The new PBS listings of valsartan (Diovan[®]) and valsartan with hydrochlorothiazide (Co-Diovan[®]), and new strengths of telmisartan with hydrochlorothiazide (Micardis Plus[®] 80/25 mg) and trandolapril with verapamil hydrochloride (Tarka[®] 2/180 mg) will also provide further options for the treatment of patients with hypertension.

More than 300,000 Australians are affected by glaucoma. From today, people with glaucoma will benefit from the addition of certain eye preparations for the treatment of glaucoma in the optometrical section of the Schedule of Pharmaceutical Benefits. These listings will allow for optometrists to prescribe eye preparations as PBS-subsidised medicines.

These medicines will be available through the PBS if there is a 'shared care' arrangement involving an authorised optometrist, an ophthalmologist and the patient's general practitioner. Shared care arrangements promote integrated management of glaucoma by health professionals.

Also from today, the PBS restrictions for transplant patients to access tacrolimus (Prograf[®]) will be expanded to include people who have transplants such as the pancreas, pancreatic cells (pancreatic islet) or liver cells (hepatocytes). This extension is expected to benefit up to 30 patients annually. Tacrolimus has previously been available through the PBS for patients with liver, kidney, heart and lung transplants to reduce the risk of transplant rejection.

Extensions to the PBS listings of risperidone will allow for the continued treatment in patients aged 18 years and older with severe behavioural disturbances associated with autism who commenced treatment with risperidone before they turned 18.

Until now, the PBS listing of risperidone was limited to the treatment of severe behavioural disturbances in a child or adolescent aged less than 18 years with autism. Expanded access to risperidone through the PBS will be of great benefit to adult patients with autism, as this PBS medicine may be continued throughout adulthood, if necessary.

Patients requiring certain kinds of medicinal foods will also benefit from new listings on the PBS.

Amylopectin (Glycosade[®]) is newly listed for the treatment of patients who have glycogen storage disease, a genetic metabolism disorder that affects the processing of glycogen (glucose) within muscles, liver and other organs.

This medicinal food is estimated to assist two patients in the first year of its listing, at a cost to the Australian Government of \$17,213, and up to 10 patients in the fifth year of listing, at a cost of \$86,064.

Essential amino acids formula (EAA Supplement[®]) is now listed for use in the dietary management of urea cycle disorders and other rare conditions that require a very low protein diet. There are no expected cost implications for the PBS as a result of this listing, as it will serve existing patients by providing another medicinal food option.

Phenylalanine with carbohydrate (Phenylalanine Amino Acid Supplement[®]) is a medicinal food that has been newly listed for patients with tyrosinaemia. This condition is an error of metabolism, usually inborn, in which the body cannot effectively break down the amino acid tyrosine.

Another medicinal food which is now PBS-listed is triglycerides (MCT Pro-Cal[®]), for use in the dietary management of fat malabsorption, long chain fatty acid oxidation disorders, Type 1 hyperlipoproteinaemia, chylothorax and management of malnutrition.

The number of patients who require phenylalanine with carbohydrate or triglycerides in Australia is very small.

Information about medicines subsidised by the Australian Government through the PBS is available at <http://www.pbs.gov.au>

For all media inquiries please contact the Minister's office – 02 6277 7220