

December 19, 2007

Hon. Theresa Oswald
302 Legislative Building
450 Broadway,
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3C 0V8

Sent via email to:
minhlt@leg.gov.mb.ca
Original mailed

Dear Minister Oswald:

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 6,000 Manitobans 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 criteria¹. 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 despite the fact that they have been under review for up to two and a half years. Manitoba 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 Manitoba and should be to the Government of Manitoba, too.

The inclusion of biologic response modifiers is central to improving and maintaining the health of Manitobans living with ankylosing spondylitis. There is irrefutable evidence supporting the use of biologic response modifiers for the treatment and management of ankylosing spondylitis². 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.

¹ CEDAC recommendations: http://www.cadth.ca/media/cdr/complete/cdr_complete_Humira_Resubmission_June-27-2007.pdf

² Rudwaleit et al. *Arthritis and Rheumatism*, 2007; vol.56, #9 (supp): S871; van der Heijde, *Arthritis and Rheumatism*, 2007; vol.56, #9 (supp): S252; Keat et al. *Rheumatology*, 2005; 44:939-947; Boonen et al. *Arthritis Rheum* 2006; **65**:201–8.

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 disability³.

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 Manitobans 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,



Corrie Billedeau
MB Steering Committee Representative
Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance
Person with rheumatoid arthritis



Cheryl Koehn
Person with rheumatoid arthritis
President, Arthritis Consumer Experts

C.c. Arlene Wilgosh, Assistant Deputy Minister
C.c. Gail Keeley, Executive Director, Provincial Drug Programs

Note: Please address reply correspondence to Ms. Cheryl Koehn, Arthritis Consumer Experts, 910 B Richards Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 3C1; or, Anne Dooley, 206 Garrison Crescent, Saskatoon, SK. S7H 2Z8

³ Kobelt et al. *Rheumatology* 2004;**43**:1158–66.; Keat et al. *Rheumatology*, 2005; 44:939-947; Boonen et al. *Arthritis Rheum* 2006;**65**:201–8.