

August 15, 2007

Honourable Ross Wiseman  
Department of Health and Community Services  
Confederation Building  
1<sup>st</sup>. Floor West Block  
P.O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL  
A1B 4J6

**Sent via email to:**  
**rosswiseman@gov.nl.ca**  
**Original mailed**

Dear Minister Wiseman:

In an effort to work collaboratively with government, Arthritis Consumer Experts and the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance are writing to bring your attention to the June 27, 2007 Common Drug Review's **Canadian Expert Drug Advisory Committee (CEDAC) recommendation that abatacept (Orencia®), in combination with a disease modifying anti-rheumatic drug (DMARD), be added to provincial drug benefit plans for people with severely active rheumatoid arthritis who have failed on an anti-tumour necrosis factor ("anti-TNF") therapy. (See attached CEDAC recommendation.)**

As noted in our letter of December 18, 2007, abatacept's mechanism of action is entirely new in comparison to other biologic response modifiers currently listed on the province's drug benefit plan. This new medication works by interfering with T-cells that promote inflammation, making them inactive and unable to cause the hallmark outcomes of rheumatoid arthritis – joint destruction and long term disability. This new medication is an important one to include on the drug benefit plan as the research is conclusive that numerous different molecules – like in HIV/AIDS and cancer – cause and promote the disease. And just like in HIV/AIDS, it is a cocktail of medication treatments that help as much as possible to restore the normal immune function of the person living with rheumatoid arthritis. No two people living with rheumatoid arthritis respond to the same cocktail of medications.

For the above reasons, and in light of the CEDAC recommendation and your strong support for the Common Drug Review process, we urge you **to take the immediate necessary steps to list abatacept on the provincial drug benefit plan**. We remind you that this therapy is intended to treat citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador with moderate to severe rheumatoid arthritis who did not respond to an anti-TNF therapy. At present, no effective treatment options are available for these individuals. Providing a timely reimbursement listing for this medication will ensure that people living with rheumatoid arthritis in Newfoundland and Labrador will have critical treatment options that will reduce the pain, deformity and work disability associated with delayed treatment.

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

Sincerely,



Cheryl Koehn  
President, Arthritis Consumer Experts  
Person with rheumatoid arthritis



Anne Dooley  
President, Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance  
Person with rheumatoid arthritis

Encl.

C.c. Colleen Janes, Director, Pharmaceutical Services

**Note: Please address reply correspondence to Ms. Cheryl Koehn, Arthritis Consumer Experts, 910 B Richards Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 3C1.**