

December 10, 2007

Honourable Brad Cathers
Yukon Legislative Assembly
Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2C6

Sent via email to:
brad.cathers@gov.yk.ca
Original mailed

Dear Minister Cathers:

We, as members of Arthritis Consumer Experts and the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance, are writing to re-draw your attention to a critical issue facing citizens of the Yukon living with **ankylosing spondylitis – the complete lack of availability to 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 any of the other two biologic medications on the market and approved for use in this disease. To date the Yukon 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 the Yukon and should be to the Government of the Yukon, too.

The inclusion of biologic response modifiers is central to improving and maintaining the health of Yukoners 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

²² 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.** We remind you that providing a timely reimbursement listing for this medication will ensure that citizens of the Yukon 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 that people have who live in other provinces and territories in Canada.

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

Sincerely,



Cheryl Koehn
President, Arthritis Consumer Experts
Person with rheumatoid arthritis

Ron Woznow, PhD
Executive Director
The Arthritis Society,
BC and Yukon Division



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

C.c. Dianne Tait, Manager, Extended Benefits and Pharmaceutical 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.