PHARMACY GUILD OF NEW ZEALAND

2 May 2023

PHARMAC
PO Box 10254
The Terrace
Wellington 6143

Sent via email to: consult@pharmac.govt.nz

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: COVID-19 antivirals - The role of molnupiravir in New Zealand's funded treatments portfolio

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the above consultation.

The Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand (Inc.) (the Guild) is a national membership organisation representing the majority of community pharmacy owners. We provide leadership on all issues affecting the sector and advocate for the business and professional interests of community pharmacy.

Our feedback on this consultation focuses on Guild members' concerns around general economic, funding and supply issues. Guild submissions should not be taken as any endorsement of, or any attempt to comment on, issues of safety, efficacy or individual patient utility.

Although we are aware that the latest clinical findings indicate that molnupiravir (Lagevrio®) might not be as clinically effective as anticipated in the treatment of Covid-19 positive people, we still feel that, barring the introduction of a viable alternative with the same safety profile, Pharmac should **not** stop funding molnupiravir and delist it from the Pharmaceutical Schedule.

We agree that the clinical efficacy of molnupiravir seems less than ideal and the recent PANORAMIC randomised controlled trial[2] presented that molnupiravir does not seem to have a significant impact on hospital admissions for the studied vaccinated population, however several other international studies have shown that initial molnupiravir treatment can reduce the length and severity of hospital stays and reduce risks of mortality and in-hospital disease progression. [1,3,4]

Studies have also shown that there are benefits of treatment with molnupiravir in terms of faster time to recovery, with fever visits to general practitioners for those people not hospitalised.[2] For this reason we still believe molnupiravir has an important role to play in the treatment of Covid-19 positive people in New Zealand in specific circumstances for the highest risk patients, including those with severe immunosuppression, in residential aged care facilities and the unvaccinated population, where all other treatment options are contraindicated or clinically inappropriate, and molnupiravir should continue to be made available and funded to assist in alleviating primary healthcare workforce pressures and burden on secondary healthcare services.

We therefore do **not** support Pharmac's proposal to make changes to the eligibility criteria for molnupiravir to limit funded access to a smaller group of people who may still be expected to benefit from treatment at this point in time. We believe there should be an alternative initial treatment option available to people who are not clinically able to be treated with Paxlovid or other treatment options before any of these changes are considered. The clinical decision process as to which Covid-

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19 antiviral treatment to prescribe for a Covid-19 positive person should be left to the clinician after a shared decision-making process, in consultation with specialist clinicians where necessary.

We have also included some responses to the general consultation questions:

- Are there any particular groups of people who are being treated with funded molnupiravir in New Zealand who may still benefit from it?

Yes, the vulnerable Covid-19 positive population who are clinically ineligible for Paxlovid treatment.

- Is there any way to clearly identify the groups of people who would be expected to benefit from treatment with molnupiravir?

Yes, by using the current eligibility criteria for Paxlovid to identify if Paxlovid treatment is clinically suitable for them.

- Are there any groups of people who would be negatively impacted if molnupiravir was not publicly funded in New Zealand?

Yes, general practice, primary care, and secondary and emergency care, as well as Covid-19 positive people who are unable to be treated with Paxlovid or other treatment options, who may have had benefit from treatment with molnupiravir.

- Would any of these groups not be able to receive other funded Covid-19 antivirals (i.e., nirmatrelvir with ritonavir or remdesivir)? If not, why not?

No, these groups of people would not be clinically eligible to receive Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir with ritonavir) and would need access to secondary care facilities to receive remdesivir.

- How would these people's acute Covid-19 disease be managed if molnupiravir was no longer funded in New Zealand?

These Covid-19 positive people would need to be managed in hospital.

- Is there any information or evidence Pharmac should be aware of to support our ongoing consideration of funding for molnupiravir?

Please see references below.

Thank you for your consideration of our response. If you have any questions about our feedback, please contact our Senior Advisory Pharmacists, Martin Lowis (martin@pgnz.org.nz, 04 802 8218) or Cathy Martin (cathy@pgnz.org.nz, 04 802 8214).

Yours sincerely,

Nicole Rickman
General Manager – Membership and Professional Services

References:

1. *Molnupiravir and risk of hospital admission or death in adults with covid-19: emulation of a randomized target trial using electronic health records, https://www.bmj.com/content/380/bmj-2022-072705#:~:text=In%20the%20MOVe%2DOUT%20trial,1.1%25%20in%20our%20study)*
2. *Molnupiravir plus usual care versus usual care alone as early treatment for adults with COVID-19 at increased risk of adverse outcomes (PANORAMIC): an open-label, platform-adaptive randomised controlled trial, https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)02597-1/fulltext*
3. *Real-world effectiveness of molnupiravir and nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir against mortality, hospitalisation, and in-hospital outcomes among community-dwelling, ambulatory patients with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection during the omicron wave in Hong Kong: an observational study - The Lancet*
4. *Effectiveness of Molnupiravir and Nirmatrelvir-Ritonavir in Hospitalized Patients With COVID-19: A Target Trial Emulation Study - PubMed (nih.gov)*