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Media release

New funding for anti-smoking drug

PHARMAC is marking Smokefree Day by announcing funding for the smoking cessation drug bupropion (Zyban) from 1st July 2009.

Funding bupropion will provide another subsidised option for people seeking to give up smoking, says PHARMAC's Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie. The Government currently funds nicotine replacement therapy for smoking cessation through the Ministry of Health's Quitline programme.

Dr Moodie says PHARMAC expects the availability of a further funded product, and its availability by prescription from doctors, to increase the number of people using subsidised anti-smoking therapies. Currently about 50,000 people use nicotine replacement therapy annually.

"This has certainly been the experience in Australia," says Dr Moodie. "This is because there seem to be a number of people who have tried and failed, or been reluctant to try nicotine replacement therapy, and these people will be attracted by the availability of a further treatment option."

Dr Moodie says bupropion may not be appropriate for all people trying to give up smoking, and should be used in close consultation with their doctors.

Nationally, smoking accounts for about 5000 deaths every year. This is mainly through incidences of lung cancer and cardiovascular disease, both of which are Government health priorities. Reducing the rate of smoking is recognised as a significant factor in reducing the burden of cancer and heart disease.

Smokefree Day is promoted through the Smokefree Day Group that comprises nine members. Information on Smokefree Day is available at <http://www.worldsmokefreeday.org.nz/>.

Funding for bupropion comes from a multi-product agreement PHARMAC reached with GlaxoSmithKline that also included the antiviral drug valaciclovir (Valtrex) for herpes infection, and a large-volume spacer device for asthma inhalers, called Volumatic.

Overall the agreement with GSK provides net savings to the pharmaceutical budget.

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