

Cancer charity outlines limitations of Cancer Drugs Fund

Submitted by: Myeloma UK

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NHS England has today announced that the myeloma drugs Imnovid® (pomalidomide), Revlimid® (lenalidomide) and one indication of Velcade® (bortezomib) are set to remain on the list of cancer drugs approved through the National Cancer Drugs Fund.

This means that patients with myeloma, an incurable bone marrow cancer, will be able to continue to access these important drugs through the Cancer Drugs Fund. However, as well as keeping these drugs on the nationally approved list, another indication of Velcade will be removed from the list.

Whilst Velcade is approved for patients in certain settings by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), this decision means that in two months time patients who have multiply relapsed myeloma and need retreatment with Velcade might not be able to access it. However, this decision will not affect patients in this setting who are currently receiving Velcade through the Cancer Drugs Fund.

Cancer charity Myeloma UK, which supports patients and families affected by the cancer, has commented on the decision. Whilst outlining its disappointment that patients will be prevented from accessing Velcade in this setting, it has also consistently reiterated its opinion on the limitations of the Cancer Drugs Fund and has argued that it is not a sustainable way to improve the treatment of cancer patients in the long term.

Chief Executive of the charity, Eric Low OBE, commented:

“Whilst a number of our treatments including Imnovid and Revlimid are still available through the Cancer Drugs Fund, we are obviously disappointed about the decision on retreatment with Velcade for multiply relapsed patients. These recent events have reaffirmed what Myeloma UK has always argued - that quick-fix measures such as the Cancer Drugs Fund are not effective long-term solutions to securing cancer patients access to medicines. Throwing money at fixing a complex issue does not solve the underlying reasons why these drugs are not available on the NHS in the first place.”

The Cancer Drugs Fund is a £250 million a year fund, which sits outside of the normal NHS commissioning budget and process, used to fund a nationally approved list of cancer drugs which are not routinely available on the NHS.

Today’s announcements are a result of recent reforms which have given the Cancer Drugs Fund Panel the power to reassess the list on the basis of cost and to remove the drugs from the list that are considered not to represent good value to the NHS.

As a number of high profile cancer drugs have been identified for being ‘delisted’, there has been public outcry in the press and media from a number of sources, including patient organisations and industry.

“We totally understand why stakeholders including charities and industry are upset by the removal of certain treatments from the list, but it should not have come as such a surprise. This situation has been inevitable since the establishment of the Fund, given the finite and fixed nature of the budget and the insistence of certain pharmaceutical companies to price their treatments at a level that does not

represent an appropriate level of value to the NHS.” Mr Low continued.

The time is long overdue for system-wide solutions and we very much urge the current and post-election Government to consider the long-term future of the Cancer Drugs Fund and to come up with a more sustainable and systemic approach to how new drugs are brought to market and accessed by patients. If politics dictate that the Cancer Drugs Fund will continue, it is only right that the drugs are assessed on cost, as well as clinical benefit – otherwise through funding treatments that are not cost-effective, there is the potential for other NHS patients to lose out.”

The announcements from NHS England on the drugs that will be delisted represent a two-month warning to the NHS and doctors that these drugs will no longer be available for patients on the NHS, although patients currently receiving drugs through the Fund will not have funding withdrawn. Of the drugs that have been reassessed through the list, a number of drugs will be removed and others will remain funded for cancer patients as they have demonstrated good effectiveness in clinical trials and have a cost which is considered by NHS England to be a fair reflection of its value.

ENDS

Notes to editors

Enquiries

For media inquiries, please contact Ben McKendrick, Communications and External Affairs Director, by email at ben.mckendrick@myeloma.org.uk or on 07508 799 405

Alternatively, please contact Kate Morgan, Senior Policy Officer, by emailing kate.morgan@myeloma.org.uk or calling 0131 557 3332.

About myeloma

Myeloma is an increasingly common cancer of plasma cells. Plasma cells are found in the bone marrow and are responsible for protecting the body against infection.

- o There is currently no cure but treatment can halt its progress and improve patients' quality of life
- o Complications of myeloma include severe bone pain, bone fractures, kidney damage and frequent infection
- o The causes of myeloma are uncertain, but there are thought to be multiple potential trigger factors, including exposure to petroleum-based products and some pesticides
- o Myeloma is the second most common type of blood cancer but represents only 1% of all cancers
- Every year in the UK, approximately 4,700 people are diagnosed with myeloma and it is estimated there are around 14,000 myeloma patients in the UK at any point in time

- Overall survival in myeloma has improved at a faster rate than any other cancer in the UK in the last 10 years. Despite this, myeloma has one of the worst survival rates of any cancer in the UK

About Myeloma UK

Myeloma UK is the only organisation in the UK dealing exclusively with myeloma. A registered charity since 1997, our broad and innovative range of services cover every aspect of myeloma, from information and support to improving standards of treatment and care through research, education, campaigning and raising awareness. Our strategy is to take an integrated approach to systematically address the critical barriers and challenges that are preventing and slowing down myeloma research and the development of, and access to, new treatments, optimal care, information and support.

www.myeloma.org.uk

About the treatments

You can find out further information about the treatments discussed in the press release on www.myeloma.org.uk