Hepatitis C: Great news for Australians!

April 24, 2015 By Grace Campbell

By now you should have worked out that I'm Australian. I think my accent gives it away.

Today I am a very happy Australian. This is a completely celebratory, no-holds-barred, happy, dancing round the lounge room blog post.

Today the 230,000+ Australians living (and dying) with Hepatitis C came one step closer to a chance of a cure.

Today the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) met and recommended listing three of the new direct acting antivirals on the Pharmaceuticals Benefit Scheme (PBS). Now come the negotiations between the various health departments and drug companies.

For the non-Australians, this means these drugs, when available after negotiations, will be available through the PBS.

"...the PBS provides timely, reliable and affordable access to necessary medicines for Australians. The PBS is part of the Australian Government's broader National Medicines Policy.

The aim of the National Medicines Policy is to meet medication and related service needs, so that both optimal health outcomes and economic objectives are achieved.

Under the PBS, the government subsidises the cost of medicine for most medical conditions. Most of the listed medicines are dispensed by pharmacists, and used by patients at home."

(from PBS website)

This means the new treatments that have meant so much to so many overseas will finally be available here. It's a great day in the fight against Hepatitis C.

I'm thrilled on a number of levels. I'm thrilled because this opens up options for ALL of us, not just those lucky enough to be on a trial or a compassionate access program. I'm thrilled because this will help real people that I know. I'm thrilled because I know some of the people who have worked so hard and lobbied so long for this outcome.

I don't mind admitting I had a few tears when I saw the news.

Now let's stop playing politics with people's lives and get on with the job of curing people. God knows we've waited long enough.

The press release from Hepatitis Australia follows:

Recommendations to include three ground breaking curative antiviral therapies on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme is a watershed moment which will fundamentally change the way hepatitis C is treated in Australia.

Hepatitis Australia CEO, Helen Tyrrell welcomed the positive PBAC recommendations for sofosbuvir (Sovaldi), ledipasvir/sofosbuvir (known as Harvoni overseas), and daclatasvir/sofosbuvir (Daklinza/Sovaldi). Ms Tyrrell urged the Federal Government “to accept the experts’ advice and ensure a PBS listing is not delayed”.

"The PBAC recommendations are great news for people living with hepatitis C and moves Australia a step closer to making 2015 a watershed year for hepatitis C. However, without confirmation of a PBS listing date, people with hepatitis C are still waiting for access to these medicines.

“With the approval of Cabinet, people with hepatitis C genotypes 1, 2, 3 and 4 (the main genotypes in Australia) will at last have affordable access to interferon-free therapy,” she added.

Ms Tyrrell is calling on the Department of Health and the companies that make the new medicines to finalise negotiations so that “Cabinet can approve funding for these life-saving medicines in the next few months to help meet the nationally approved treatment targets for 2015”.

"The Government has committed to doubling hepatitis C treatment rates each year as part of the National Strategy. They now have the opportunity to make 2015 a watershed year for hepatitis C and start us on the path to eliminating hepatitis C.
"More than 50 Australians lose their lives to hepatitis C-related liver disease every month - and thousands more live with the psychological and physical burden of the illness.

“The Federal Government has an historical opportunity to make interferon-free options available for all people living with hepatitis C. Each day of delay in access to these curative medicines is agony for many of the 230,000 Australians living with the virus,” she added.

Sofosbuvir, ledipasvir/sofosbuvir and daclatasvir/sofosbuvir are new generation antivirals. They have exceptionally high cure-rates that exceed 90%, a shorter duration of treatment and are much better tolerated than traditional therapies.

Hepatitis Australia noted that the opportunity to meet with PBAC members before they reviewed company submissions was extremely beneficial and welcomed the PBAC’s decision not to impose undue clinical restrictions on access to the new treatments.

(from Hepatitis Australia website)

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