Musings on the Australian government's HCV annoucement

December 21, 2015 By Grace Campbell

It's been an interesting 36 or so hours following the Turnbull government's announcement of ground-breaking changes to the way hepatitis C treatment is handled, that's for sure. I've been curious to see what's being said around the traps. I follow a few groups and pages on Facebook, actively post on a couple of forums, read a couple more and generally have a slightly distracted view of what's being said (basically because I'm trying to get organised to fly out of the country and I have the attention span of a fruit fly).

So, like I said, it's been interesting.

I've read opinions from a number of people who believed that the government would not fund universal access to DAAs. I've seen it said time and time again that like the States, it would be triaged. And yet the Minister for Health Sussan Ley's press release stated:

"In a "watershed moment" in Australian history, Minister for Health Sussan Ley today announced Australia would become one of the first in the world to publicly subsidise these cures - currently costing patients up to $100,000 - for the nation's entire population of Hep C sufferers, no matter what their condition or how they contracted it."

She went on to say:

""Hepatitis C takes a heavy toll on patients and their families, but also the health system and the economy. It's therefore important we tackle this disease head on, and ***that includes providing these medicines to all Australians, particularly vulnerable populations where rates of infection are high****."* (emphasis mine)

I've read that the money simply won't be enough to treat everyone. I know though, that the government and drug companies have negotiated on a risk sharing basis, so let's wait and see the fine print before we start being negative. We were not privy to the negotiations and anything we say is a guess at best.

I've also heard people decrying this as a political decision. Of course it's a political decision. It's made by politicians. But what I also see is a massive shift in government perception. They have stated that everyone is entitled to a cure. Everyone, regardless of status, health condition,

whether they are in prison or out, whether they inject drugs or don't.

The decision to use certain drugs or drug companies might not be to everyone's liking. That's okay, people don't have to take the government path to treatment. They can choose other paths. There are other paths available thanks to generic importation.

Let's take a moment to think about what a great step this is. The right to universal access for these new drugs has been publicly acknowledged by a conservative LNP government. Isn't that amazing?

Let's show appreciation for the people who have worked so hard to make this happen. Spare a thought for those who have spent years advocating so we can get the benefit of their work. Let's take a moment and acknowledge that many people and organisations have played a part. The government, advisors, clinicians, doctors, generic advocates, non government groups - we've all had an impact.

"Where there is unity there is always victory."
Pubilius Syrus

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