



HOLD FOR RELEASE UNTIL FRIDAY 22 OCTOBER 2010

Media release – Thyroid Support New Zealand Inc – Friday 22 October 2010

Thyroid Support New Zealand presents petition on the funding of thyroid medication to Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Bill English

Invercargill, Friday 22 October 2010

Thyroid Support New Zealand Inc and Temuka pharmacist Allan Campbell will today present a petition to Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Bill English on behalf of 719 signatories of the petition. The Deputy Prime Minister will receive the petition on behalf of the Minister of Health, Hon Tony Ryall. The hand over will take place at 5pm at MP Eric Roy's electoral office at 97 Dee Street, Invercargill.

The signatories of the petition ask the Minister of Health to direct Medsafe to approve, and Pharmac to subsidise, some specific brands of medicines for the treatment of hypothyroidism (levothyroxine).

Most importantly, the signatories ask for the funding of tablets of the brand Eltroxin that are made in Canada. These tablets used to be funded in New Zealand until mid-2007, when the manufacturer GlaxoSmithKline moved some of its production from Canada to Germany, at the same time changing the formulation and manufacturing process of the tablets. Patients were told that the tablets were no longer being made in Canada.

For many patients in New Zealand these changes turned out to be a disaster. Over 1,400 reports of side effects – most likely the tip of the iceberg - were reported to the Centre for Adverse Reactions Monitoring in Dunedin. As the problems resulting from the changed formulation of Eltroxin were initially not recognised by many health care professionals and the responsible government agencies, patients were often wrongly treated for the side effects and had many unnecessary and expensive tests done at the taxpayer's or their own expense. It took a long time until two alternative brands were also funded: Goldshield and Synthroid.

As has become apparent, not all patients are doing well on the alternative brands either. What brand suits a patient is a very individual matter. Contrary to what patients were led to believe, the original formulation of Eltroxin is still being made in

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Canada. An increasing number of patients who experienced the side effects of the German made formulation of Eltroxin, and who did insufficiently improve on the alternative brands, now import the original formulation of Eltroxin from Canada at their own expense. These patients report significant improvements in their health and well-being.

Thyroid Support New Zealand and the 719 signatories of the petition are very concerned that still a large number of patients, particularly those in rest homes and hospitals, are being given the German made formulation of Eltroxin. They fear that if these patients are experiencing side effects of Eltroxin, this will be blamed on old age or other medical conditions, instead of being recognised as side effects and the patients being changed over to another brand of levothyroxine. These patients will continue to suffer, unless the German made formulation of Eltroxin is taken off the New Zealand market.

The petition, for that reason, does not only ask that the Canada made formulation of Eltroxin becomes subsidised again, and that Goldshield and Synthroid remain funded. The petition also requests that the Minister of Health directs Pharmac to stop the funding of the new, German made formulation of Eltroxin. Only if that happens, patients who are unaware that their health problems may be the result of side effects of their thyroid medication, have a chance of improved health. It will also put an end to wrongful treatment of side effects and the waste of money on expensive and unnecessary tests.

Media release by:

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More information:

- [full text of the petition on the funding of levothyroxine](#)
- *The Eltroxin formulation change: An analysis of reports received by CARM, Dr M. Tatley, Director, New Zealand Pharmacovigilance Centre, 4 September 2008*
(<http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/hot/alerts/CARM%20Report%20September%202008.pdf>)
- on similar reports of side effects in Denmark, see
<http://www.dkma.dk/1024/visUKLSArtikel.asp?artikelID=17410>

Thyroid Support New Zealand Inc is a voluntary organisation established by thyroid patients for thyroid patients, their families and their friends. A full description of the purposes of TSNZ can be found online at www.thyroidsupportnz.co.nz. Thyroid Support New Zealand was registered as an incorporated society on 11 August 2009.

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