

To: Hon Tony Ryall
Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6011

cc: Sue Kedgley MP; Jackie Blue MP; Hon Ruth Dyson MP; Hon Sir Roger Douglas MP; Hon Tariana Turia MP and Associate Minister of Health; Hon Jim Anderton MP; Hon Peter Dunne MP and Associate Minister of Health

22 October 2010

Petition on the funding of medicines for the treatment of hypothyroidism

Dear Minister Ryall

Request

We, the undersigned, request that you direct Medsafe to approve for sale, supply and use in New Zealand unconditionally, and direct Pharmac to subsidise, the following medicines for the treatment of hypothyroidism:

- Eltroxin (original formulation, manufactured in Canada) (50mcg, 100mcg)
- Synthroid (25mcg, 50mcg, 100mcg)
- Goldshield levothyroxine (50mcg, 100mcg).

We also request that you direct Pharmac to stop the funding of the following medicine for the treatment of hypothyroidism:

- Eltroxin (new formulation, manufactured in Germany) (50mcg, 100mcg).

Background

In 2007, the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline started the distribution in New Zealand of a new formulation of the thyroid medicine Eltroxin, which was at that time the only funded thyroid medication (levothyroxine) in New Zealand. Medsafe had approved this new formulation.

Many thyroid patients in New Zealand suffered serious adverse reactions to the new Eltroxin. The Centre for Adverse Reactions Monitoring (CARM) in Dunedin received around 1,400 reports of adverse reactions to this drug.* Since then, other countries (e.g. Denmark) have also reported adverse reactions to the new GSK Eltroxin.

Although to our great relief two other brands of levothyroxine have been subsidised since November 2008 (Goldshield) and August 2009 (Synthroid), we are concerned that these brands do not suit every thyroid patient. Many patients who used to do well on the original Eltroxin are still suffering from health problems due to the unsuitability of their current thyroid medication.

In spite of what we were led to believe, the original formulation of Eltroxin is still being made in Canada. Several patients who were not doing well on Goldshield and Synthroid now take the original Eltroxin, imported from Canada, but at their own cost and not everyone can afford it.

In our view, the original formulation of Eltroxin (manufactured in Canada) should again be approved for distribution in New Zealand, and subsidised, instead of the new formulation of Eltroxin that has caused so much harm. Synthroid and Goldshield should obviously remain subsidised. We note that Goldshield is only provisionally approved for sale, supply or use in New Zealand for a two year period that will expire on 23 October 2010.

Thyroid patients in New Zealand who were suffering from the side effects of the new formulation of Eltroxin have been deceived and publicly portrayed as menopausal hypochondriacs who were imagining their health problems. Some are still not taken seriously by their medical practitioners who prefer to blame their health problems on old age or depression, order expensive tests paid with taxpayers' money, do nothing, or prescribe anti-depressants.

These thyroid patients have never received an apology from GlaxoSmithKline, the previous Minister of Health, the responsible Government agencies, or the medical practitioners that failed them. No one has been held accountable for the failure of our health system in this matter. We feel that it is about time that thyroid patients are taken seriously and listened to. Under your leadership as Minister of Health, Synthroid became funded. We are, therefore, hopeful that you will grant our requests in this petition and will not let us down as others have.

We would welcome a response to this petition to be sent to Thyroid Support New Zealand Inc.

This petition is an initiative of Thyroid Support New Zealand Inc.

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

You can find the names and details of the 719 persons that signed this petition (many by email) on the attached signature lists.

* For further information we refer to: *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>) and *Eltroxin Update*, Medsafe, February 2009 (<http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/PUArticles/Eltroxin-feb09.htm>)