



Media Release

Prescribing decline a healthy trend - PHARMAC

A continuing decline in prescription figures for the most commonly used antibiotics is a healthy sign, says PHARMAC's Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie.

PHARMAC has today launched the 11th annual Wise Use of Antibiotics campaign, aimed at encouraging appropriate use of antibiotics and reducing antibiotic resistance.

Dr Moodie says there has been a continuing decrease in the volume of antibiotics prescribed to six to 18-year-olds and under-six-year-olds, with almost 25,000 less prescriptions in this age group during the winter months of 2007 compared with the year before.

“This downward trend is extremely good news as pre-schoolers and young children are among the most frequent patient groups to see a doctor about a viral illness during the winter months.”

This trend is encouraging, as is a reduction in people's expectations for receiving antibiotics, Dr Moodie says. A survey by Colmar Brunton at the end of last winter revealed that 62% of people expected antibiotics when they visited the doctor about a cold or flu. This compares to 80% who expected antibiotics in a similar survey 10 years ago.

“These are encouraging statistics, because these are vital medicines for treating bacterial infections. If antibiotics are overused, it will contribute to the growth in antibiotic resistance. Antibiotic resistance is a global threat to public health and that's why it's so important that antibiotics are not over-used or prescribed inappropriately.”

Dr Moodie says the central message in this year's campaign is 'if in doubt, check it out'. People should not hesitate to visit their doctor if they are concerned about winter colds and flu.

“The aim of this campaign is to ensure that the treatment a patient receives is the most appropriate for their illness – and if it's a cold or flu, the doctor is going to prescribe bed-rest, paracetamol and lots of fluids. We need to reserve antibiotics for the bugs they can fight, not the ones they can't.”

The PHARMAC-led campaign is supported by The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners, Plunket, the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand, the Pharmacy Guild, doctors groups and PHOs around New Zealand.

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For more information please call (021) 429-212.