

7 August 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA RELEASE

Blood cancer patient advocacy group presents to Health Select Committee to fund life-extending treatments

Dr Ken Romeril, chief executive, Myeloma New Zealand, is appearing today before the Health Select Committee in support of their submission asking for funding of six life-extending treatments for multiple myeloma patients.

Dr Romeril said there have been huge advances in myeloma treatment internationally, but no new anti-myeloma medicines have been funded in NZ in the last 5 years and NZ consistently ranks 19th or last out of 20 OECD countries in access to new medicines, and that needs to change.

“Today I am pleading to the Health Select Committee on behalf of Myeloma New Zealand and over 2,500 patients living with this disease, that they recommend the funding of these six life-extending treatments, which will bring myeloma treatment in-line with international best practice.”

Dr Romeril is also urging the committee to acknowledge that Pharmac’s ‘rationing by delay’ model is not fit for purpose when it comes to assessing these life and death type cancer drugs.

“People can’t wait. The Committee should also as a matter of priority oversee the establishment of a rapid access scheme based on the best models in place overseas. The goal of clinicians internationally is to turn Myeloma into a chronic disease rather than a fatal one, and the key to that is tailoring combination treatment to each individual’s disease” said Dr Romeril.

Multiple myeloma is a deadly, complex blood cancer of malignant plasma cells which is now the second fastest growing blood cancer in the world. Every year New Zealand sees 400 new cases and 180 deaths from the disease.

The submission to the Health Select Committee follows a petition signed by over 2,000 signatories asking for funding for daratumumab, carfilzomib, lenalidomide (for maintenance), pomalidomide, elotuzumab and ixazomib.

Consultant Haematologists Dr Henry Chan and Dr Anup George, and multiple myeloma patient Joy Wilkie will also be appearing before the Health Select Committee to support the submission.

ENDS

Ken Romeril
Chief Executive Officer
Myeloma New Zealand
Ph 027 443 2624
www.multiplemyeloma.org.nz

Myeloma NZ is a registered charity set up to improve awareness and advocate for improved treatments for the 2500 patients living with this condition.

About Multiple Myeloma

Multiple myeloma, also called myeloma, or plasma cell myeloma (WHO), is an incurable blood cancer that starts in the bone marrow. Malignant plasma cells, called myeloma cells, grow uncontrollably within the bone marrow, suppressing the development of normal white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets.

Multiple myeloma spreads from the bone marrow into the bone, causing the bone to become thin, weak and more likely to fracture or break. The breakdown of the bone can cause an increase in the level of calcium in the blood. This can affect the kidneys so that they cannot filter and clean the blood properly.

Approximately 400 new cases of multiple myeloma are diagnosed in New Zealand each year. Multiple myeloma affects mainly older people and the median age for diagnosis is 66 years, but it can also affect people under 40. The incidence of multiple myeloma is about 40 per cent higher in males than females and almost twice as common in Māori as non-Māori.

The most common symptoms of the disease are bone pain and fatigue. Suspected factors in developing multiple myeloma include genetic disposition or environmental or occupational exposure to chemicals or radiation. The name multiple myeloma was given in 1873 when Russian Dr Von Rustizky described four cases of multiple tumours in bone.