Request from Cook Islands
Secretary of Health

Elizabeth Iro

New Zealand has always had a close association with the Cook Islands and Cook Islanders travel freely between the two countries. Whilst in New Zealand they may need to see a health professional—both in primary and secondary care. A significant number of Cook Islanders each year are transferred from the Cook Islands to New Zealand for medical or surgical treatment not available in the islands.

When Cook Islanders return home to the islands, many have been prescribed medicines in New Zealand that are either not available in the Cook Islands or not subsidised by the Ministry of Health, Cook Islands. This means, that medicines need to be changed to a subsidised pharmaceutical, or, if that person wishes to stay on the medicine prescribed, he or she will incur extra costs. These factors may lead to problems with the patient in obtaining a reliable supply, cause financial strain and non-compliance. It can also place a strain on the patient and clinician relationship.

The Cook Islands has a limited pharmaceutical budget and with a small population means that only a limited range of essential medicines can be funded. For example, Enalapril is the only ACE inhibitor subsidised.

The most recent revision of the Cook Islands Essential Medicines List (EML) is available for viewing or for download from the Ministry of Health website: www.health.gov.ck located under Staff Services.

We urge all New Zealand physicians to view this EML and share with colleagues. Choosing medicines from the EML would assist greatly in facilitating smoother and safer transition of care for the people who journey between our two countries and health care systems.

For essential medicines which are not on the list and for which no alternative prescription exists, we recommend that the Special Request for Drug Supply form identified within the EML on the Ministry website is downloaded, completed and faxed to the address provided on the form.

For specialised treatments used for rare conditions (eg many New Zealand Section 29 or oncology medicines); the Chief Pharmacist should be contacted. In this way when Cook Islanders return home they can be assured, that, in the majority of cases, there will be a continuity of supply of their medicines.

I thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Iro
Secretary of Health
Cook Islands

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