

16 March 2020

Peter Murray
Deputy Medical Director
PHARMAC

By email: schedule.rules@pharmac.govt.nz

Changes to dispensing frequency rules and ‘stat’ medicines list

Dear Peter

Thank you for inviting the New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) to provide feedback on the above consultation. We note that PHARMAC is proposing to expand the list of pharmaceuticals that can be dispensed as a single lot and amend the dispensing frequency rules to enable more flexible dispensing arrangements that better meet the needs of patients.

We are fully supportive of the proposed changes. In particular, we strongly support the expansion of the list of pharmaceuticals that can be dispensed in a single lot (‘stat’ dispensing). Unless a prescriber requests more frequent dispensing or wishes to limit the quantity dispensed, the state / government policy should not determine dispensing frequency—except for very expensive medications or where there is limited supply.

In general, requiring a patient to go to a pharmacy 12 times a year instead of 4 times a year to collect their medicine entails a number of additional costs including transport and time, as well as increasing the likelihood of periods without the medicine. We note that a proportion of patients do not collect repeats or are unaware they have further repeats available. Obtaining new prescriptions incurs additional co-payments of \$5 per item (or \$25 per item if prescribed by a private specialist).

The above issues notwithstanding, we believe that it is essential for pharmacists to respect those instances where prescribers override stat dispensing and request more frequent dispensing. There are often good clinical grounds for this that override other considerations including convenience (for example, monthly dispensing with two repeats may be requested so that a patient’s blood count can be monitored).

Finally, though outside the scope of this particular consultation, we reiterate our view that prescription co-payments constitute a considerable barrier to healthcare for some population groups and should be abolished.

We hope our feedback is helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "K. Baddock". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Dr Kate Baddock
NZMA Chair