Access to newly licensed medicines

Carrie Featherstone, Chair of Beatson West of Scotland Consultants Committee, Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre

We are writing to you in your capacity as the convenor of the Health and Sports Committee Inquiry into newly licenced medicines which was held on the 18th of September. We note that at the end of the Evidence session you called for any additional comments to be made to you in the coming week in order that the Work Programme of the Committee can be set.

We write collectively as a united group of consultant haematologists and oncologists from the Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre. We are concerned that issues regarding the IPTR process raised by clinicians intimately involved with the process are being overlooked.

The overall percentage approval rates quoted for the IPTR process (65%) do not take into account the different settings in which this process is used. For example, some IPTR requests are made for drugs which have been approved by the SMC but which are not yet on local hospital formularies and we would anticipate a high level of approval for such requests. On the other hand drugs which have been turned down by the SMC are likely to have a much lower rate of approval and it would be important to look at these two situations independently. In addition there is a recognition amongst clinicians that the IPTR process is only used when there is at least a reasonable expectation of a positive outcome and therefore the denominator in the approval statistics may represent an underestimate of the true need for access to treatments.

In other situations the requirement to demonstrate exceptionality of an individual treatment effectively denies patients treatment where clinical trials have demonstrated a benefit. Patients that meet the same criteria as the population of the trial are deemed not exceptional and IPTRs are turned down.

We feel that the current system requires urgent review and merits further consideration of a similar process to the cancer drug fund.

We wish to add our support to the concerns already expressed and are asking that evidence be sought from oncologists such as ourselves who see patients on a day to day basis whilst contending with a system which does not work in helping cancer patients access much needed medicines.

We would be happy to meet with you to explain these processes, how they work in practice, and how they affect our relationship with patients.

Carrie Featherstone,
Chair of Beatson West of Scotland Consultants Committee,
Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre
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