

Speech notes for Medicines and the Patient Safety Experience, 16 May 2007

Thank you for the invitation to speak this evening as you prepare for your workshop, "Medicines and the Patient Experience-Practical Solutions".

I understand that the aim of this workshop is to build a culture of medicines safety for better patient outcomes.

This is crucially important and for that reason alone I am pleased to be here.

As you will be aware, I am working on the development of a New Zealand medicines strategy as part of the confidence and supply agreement between Labour and United Future.

That work is aiming to identify what improvements are required to our current systems and structures to obtain better health and disability outcomes, and ensure New Zealanders get access to the medicines they need.

Our approach is broadly focussed and is looking across areas such as the safety and quality of medicines, access to medicines, regardless of an individual's ability to pay, and the optimal use of medicines.

Your deliberations over the next 2 days will be well aligned with the optimal use of medicines aspect of the strategy and this gathering is especially timely in that regard.

"Optimal use" means ensuring that choices about medicines, how the system delivers medicines and how individuals use medicines are safe and result in the best possible health gain.

So promoting and ensuring optimal use involves many sectors communicating and working together to ensure that the patient and therefore the patient's experience is supported by the health sector as a whole.

This includes the Ministry of Health, PHARMAC, ACC, DHBs, the Safe and Quality Use of Medicines group, the Best Practice Advocacy Centre, health professionals, registration authorities, community clinics and others.

This workshop is therefore an ideal place and time to focus on the patient and to co-ordinate, talk, build relationships, share knowledge and information, so that our health system can support the best possible health gain through the optimal use of medicines.

I am pleased that a broad representation of the sector is here to focus on solutions.

I encourage you all to participate in these activities.

An example of this type of interactive initiative is the “One Heart Many lives” campaign that aims to reduce cardiovascular disease among men, primarily Maori and Pacific Island men and their whanau and families.

The campaign encourages them to get their heart checked and promotes the appropriate use of medications for identified problems or risk factors.

The programme also addresses priority areas such as reducing obesity and the impact of diabetes, reducing smoking and increasing levels of physical activity and improving nutrition.

The PHARMAC team behind this programme are working together with a number of communities including, Hawke's Bay, and a range of health providers to bring the “One Heart Many Lives” campaign to these regions.

With a blend of changes to clinical services, innovative region wide promotions and 'street level' action by a range of both health and social agencies, the campaign is ready to 'make a difference'.

This initiative is just one initiative and I know there are others underway or proposed by the organisations present here.

With regard to the development of the New Zealand medicines strategy, the Minister of Health and I released a consultation document in December last year to gather views of all stakeholders in the medicines sector.

Submissions on the consultation document closed on 30 March, and we thank you for all the feedback and ideas that your 90 submissions have provided us with.

In the larger context of building a culture of medicines safety within the patient experience, the *Towards a New Zealand Medicines Strategy* consultation document proposed three objectives for the medicines strategy.

First, the quality, safety and efficacy of medicines.

New Zealanders rightly demand that medicines on the market are products they can have confidence in.

Regulators, manufacturers and health professionals all have a role to play in this, and I am sure it is a goal we can all agree on.

Second, access to medicines that New Zealanders need, regardless of an individual's ability to pay.

We will always need to prioritise access to medicines, and ensuring that we continue to have purchasing systems that serve us well is a key part of the strategy.

I want to examine how prioritisation decisions are made now and how they should be made in the future.

As you will know, there are an increasing number of high-cost medicines coming through the system and this looks set to continue.

These medicines may have the ability to improve health, or provide relief for people; however these benefits come at a considerable cost.

We need to look at whether the systems we have used in the past to determine whether a medicine should be funded are the right systems for assessing these new medicines, or whether we need to change our approach.

It is important to ensure people understand how funding decisions are made and have confidence that the system is fair – even if they dislike the decision that has been made.

We are actively looking at how decision-making can be made more transparent and decisions better understood.

Finally, and most importantly for this forum, the strategy looks at the optimal use of medicines.

The incorrect or inappropriate administration and use of medicines may unnecessarily prolong or even cause ill health, and wastes resources.

This can include the overuse of or underutilisation of medicines.

Another good example of cross-sector activity in the optimal use area is the Wise Use of Antibiotics campaign.

This campaign supports healthcare professionals by providing appropriate resources to manage patient expectation.

The campaign is in its ninth year and is managed and implemented by PHARMAC with support from the Pharmacy Guild, The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners, the Pharmaceutical Society and Plunket.

It aims to raise awareness about the optimal use of antibiotics over the winter months, by informing patients about when they can expect to be prescribed an antibiotic and what to do if they are to, for example; “complete the entire course”.

Unlike the activities undertaken in ensuring safe and quality use of medicines and access to medicines, optimal use activities are diffuse and are the responsibility of a wide range of people and agencies, and will involve many of you here today.

In practical terms, optimal use requires improving the networking and exchange of information between organisations and professional groups.

I believe that optimal use of medicines is one area where real gains can be made in the overall health outcomes of New Zealanders.

A number of projects are already underway in this area, and the strategy will support ongoing initiatives to help all New Zealanders get the best possible use of the medicines they are taking.

Initial analysis of the submissions received has shown a large number of suggestions on how optimal use of medicines can be improved.

I am encouraged by the fact that many groups are already acknowledging the need for optimal medicine use and are working on ways to achieve this for all New Zealanders.

I have been encouraged by the amount of dialogue that has been occurring both before the release of the consultation document and since it was put out in December last year.

It is important that people continue to discuss and debate the issues raised in the consultation document, so that we achieve a robust medicines strategy that will ensure the best health and disability support outcomes from medicines over the coming years.

While I acknowledge that different stakeholder groups will naturally have different priorities and perspectives, the aim of *Towards a New Zealand Medicines Strategy* was to get people talking together about these issues.

I am happy that this has been the case.

The support I have had from all stakeholders in pursuing a New Zealand medicines strategy has been heartening.

I would like to thank you all for your contribution to this important discussion, and look forward to your ongoing participation in this process.

This development of this strategy provides an opportunity to ensure we have the balance right in terms of medicines use in New Zealand, and ensure medicines are contributing to the health of New Zealanders in the best way they can.

I wish you all the best for the rest of your workshop and look forward to hearing about the ideas generated here regarding the New Zealand medicines strategy.

Together we can all improve patient's experiences in our health and disability system.