

Pharma Dispatch: 20 January, 2023

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New Zealand Approval for Specialised Therapeutics' Cancer Therapy

Specialised Therapeutics Asia has announced that its therapy to treat rare gastrointestinal stromal tumours, QINLOCK (ripretinib), has been approved for use in New Zealand and will now be considered for funding by PHARMAC.

The regulator, Medsafe, has approved QINLOCK for treating adult patients with GIST who have received prior treatment with three or more kinase inhibitors, including imatinib.

The company said it is being made available to eligible patients in New Zealand via a co-pay access program while it is considered by PHARMAC.

In a joint statement, medical oncologists Dr Joanna Connor and Dr Clement Korenbaum from the Auckland City Hospital said QINLOCK would provide patients with another treatment option and align with international standards of care.

"QINLOCK offers clinically meaningful benefits in progression-free and overall survival for patients living with advanced GIST," they said. "It offers an option for patients who have progressed on other treatments."

"We would now support having fully funded access to QINLOCK for all those affected by advanced GIST who meet the pivotal study's criteria."

61-year-old Auckland grandfather and sales manager Tom Turrall was diagnosed

with GIST earlier this year after being admitted to hospital for what doctors initially believed was a bleeding ulcer.

“The approval of QINLOCK means hope and an opportunity,” said Mr Turrall.

“I want to live to see my grandchildren grow. I want to live to be able to experience growing old with my wife. I want to live to be able to spend some time relaxing and enjoying what we have worked for. The approval of QINLOCK will remove a level of anxiety that I live with every day as it provides an opportunity for an additional treatment option.”

Mr Turrall said it was critical that PHARMAC now fund QINLOCK.

“PHARMAC funding will mean the financial burden is eased. We consider ourselves the average Kiwi couple. We have worked hard for what we have accumulated and are looking forward to retirement. We are not sure what we will do if we have to fund (any) treatment ourselves.”

QINLOCK belongs to a class of drugs known as tyrosine kinase inhibitors, or TKIs. It is designed to inhibit key enzymes linked to tumour growth. In Australia, it has been fully reimbursed via the PBS since 2021.

Specialised Therapeutics is commercialising QINLOCK in New Zealand under an exclusive distribution agreement from US-based Deciphera Pharmaceuticals.

CEO Carlo Montagner said, “We are hopeful for a positive outcome by PHARMAC so that patients with advanced GIST in New Zealand have ready access to this important new treatment option.”