

Highly Specialised Drugs – Clozapine Program Changes

From 1 July 2015, the Australian Government is making significant changes to the way Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) subsidised clozapine for the ongoing treatment of schizophrenia is prescribed, dispensed and accessed under the Highly Specialised Drugs (HSD) Program. The changes recognise that most people living with schizophrenia are being treated in the community and support easier access to clozapine for all Australians.

The streamlined arrangements will mean consumers can access their clozapine from the pharmacy of their choice, regardless of where it was prescribed. Under current arrangements eligible community based prescribers and consumers are required to be associated with a hospital to be able to access these medicines. From 1 July 2015, this will no longer be required for maintenance therapy.

Consumers on maintenance therapy with clozapine

Consumers can be managed in the community sector when the following conditions are met:

- After a clozapine initiation period of no less than 18 weeks;
- When the treating psychiatrist agrees that the patient is suitable for community based management;
- When the consumer's dose of clozapine is stable; and
- Under the supervision and direction of the psychiatrist, with psychiatric reviews at least every 6 months

> Prescribers

From 1 July 2015, eligible community based prescribers of clozapine (maintenance therapy only) will be able to prescribe clozapine without the need to demonstrate an affiliation with a hospital. All other prescriber eligibility criteria remain the same, including registration with a clozapine centre.

The approval process to prescribe clozapine will be the same for all prescribers, with STREAMLINED authority requirements applying to community, private and public hospital based prescribers. Authority approval will still be required for increased quantities and increased repeats.

> Community pharmacists

Registered community pharmacists will be able to dispense clozapine for all consumers on maintenance therapy as they do for other Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medications.

Community pharmacists will be required to meet their professional obligation with respect to the safe supply of clozapine, such as being registered in the clozapine patient monitoring systems, monitoring blood results and not substituting brands. To claim a streamlined authority item, an approved supplier is required to check that the appropriate 'streamlined authority code' has been included on the PBS prescription.

Prescriptions for maintenance therapy will not be sent to SA Health for processing.

> Consumers

From 1 July 2015, consumers will have improved access to clozapine for the treatment of schizophrenia (**maintenance therapy only**) within the community.

Regardless of where the medicine is prescribed, consumers will be able to access their clozapine from either a hospital or community pharmacy. Eligible consumers will no longer need to be receiving care at or from a hospital to be prescribed these medicines. All other eligibility criteria remain the same.

In alignment with the Commonwealth program, consumers will be charged a co-payment for each prescription of clozapine. The co-payment will count towards their Safety Net entitlements.

Initiation of clozapine therapy

The July 2015 changes do not affect the PBS requirements for commencement of therapy with clozapine. These consumers must be under the care of a psychiatrist for a minimum of 18 weeks and prescription dispensing occurs at a public hospital pharmacy. Distribution for pick up from a community pharmacy may occur where negotiated.

For more information about the PBS changes to clozapine go to:
www.humanservices.gov.au and search 'clozapine'.

For further information on clozapine program changes contact
Your clozapine coordinator or :
Chelsea Moore
Senior Pharmacist, Royal Adelaide Hospital
Phone: 8222 0016
chelsea.moore@health.sa.gov.au

