

Large Number Of New Zealanders Affected By Medication Changes

New Zealanders are experiencing arguably the largest medicine switch this country has ever seen. It began on January 1 for more than 200,000¹ people taking the most commonly used brand of omeprazole – a heart burn medication.

From May, funding changes will also affect the 250,000² people taking the cholesterol lowering medication LIPEX® (simvastatin, MSD) although patients could be switched from as early as today.

LIPEX is predominately used by people in the over 50 age group, and some of these patients may be amongst those New Zealanders also taking omeprazole. People using these medications will have to make a choice between switching to a Government funded generic or paying for their current medicines.

LIPEX is manufactured by Merck & Co Inc., known in New Zealand as Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSDNZ). Merck Sharp & Dohme Medical Director Australia & New Zealand, Dr David Woolner, says "It is very important when changes like this happen, that people remember to keep taking their medication. Changes like this could lead to compliance issues where patients can become confused and stop taking their tablets. This is something we do not want to see occur, as patients have been prescribed medicines like LIPEX to help prevent heart attacks and strokes³, and it is important they continue to take them as directed. If people have questions, they should see their doctor or pharmacist.

"For people taking LIPEX, this funding change means when they fill their prescription at the pharmacist, they are likely to receive a generic simvastatin medication instead of LIPEX. LIPEX will still be available for those people who do not want to change to a generic, however they will

¹ IMS data on file

² IMS data on file

need to ask specifically for LIPEX. There will be a charge of approximately \$20 per month for LIPEX medication."

Merck Sharp & Dohme Managing Director, Alister Brown, says, "While this funding change will impact a large number of patients it will also have a significant implication for pharmacists, doctors and nurses who will be working at the front line and explaining these changes to patients."

Ends

Please note the Minimum Product Information is contained in the following pages

TAPS Approval No: CH 2239

For further information or to request an interview with Dr David Woolner or Alister Brown please contact:

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About Merck

Merck & Co., Inc., which operates in many countries as Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD), is a global research-driven pharmaceutical company dedicated to putting patients first. Established in 1891, Merck discovers, develops, manufactures and markets vaccines and medicines in more than 20 therapeutic categories. The company devotes extensive efforts to increase access to medicines through far-reaching programmes that not only donate Merck medicines but help deliver them to the people who need them. Merck also publishes unbiased health information as a not-for-profit service. For more information, visit www.merck.com.

THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE USING LIPEX (simvastatin) 10, 20, 40 & 80 mg tablets:

LIPEX is indicated for patients at high risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) or with existing CHD and as an adjunct (addition) to diet for patients with high cholesterol (hyperlipidaemia). LIPEX should not be taken by patients who have a hypersensitivity reaction, active liver disease, who are pregnant or nursing. Precaution should be taken when administering LIPEX to children and to patients with muscle pain, increased creatine kinase (muscle enzymes), history of liver disease, raised liver function tests. Common side effects are: abdominal pain, constipation, flatulence. Rarely: muscle pain (myopathy), rhabdomyolysis and hepatitis. LIPEX is a fully funded, **prescription only medicine**, a prescription charge will apply. Consult your doctor to see if LIPEX is right for you, a normal doctor's visit fee will usually apply. Use only as directed and if symptoms continue or you have side effects, see your doctor, pharmacist or health professional. Marketed by: Merck Sharp & Dohme (NZ) Limited, Newmarket, Auckland. For detailed prescribing information, consult the data sheet or consumer medicine information phone 0800 500 673, or refer to the Medsafe website www.medsafe.govt.nz. [MPI-ZCR-3] ©Registered Trademark of Merck & Co Inc., Whitehouse Station, NJ, USA

³ LIPEX data sheet