



Market release
18 January 2018

Prescription-only codeine medicines in New Zealand welcomed

Yesterday the Medicines Classification Committee announced its recommendation that all codeine combination medicines, both analgesics and those used for cough and colds, should be up-scheduled from 'over the counter' to 'prescription-only' products from 2020.

This decision mirrors the recent upscheduling decision by the Therapeutic Goods Administration in Australia. From 1 February 2018, all codeine-based medicines will require a doctor's prescription in Australia.

Managing Director of AFT Pharmaceuticals, Dr Hartley Atkinson, welcomes the decision and says it is sensible given the risk of misuse or addiction that comes with codeine-based medicines.

"This decision really just brings New Zealand into line with the growing number of countries that have introduced stronger regulatory controls over codeine-based medicines," says Dr Atkinson.

"Overseas regulators have been tightening up access for a while now. The data shows that too many people around the world are misusing codeine-based medicines and New Zealand is no different."

"In a lot of cases people become addicted to codeine-based painkillers quite unintentionally, for example after surgery or having a tooth removed. Often it's a case of people not fully appreciating how addictive codeine can be given that it's an opiate."

Dr Atkinson says that the risks of misuse with codeine-based painkillers was the reason behind his creation of the company's flagship analgesic *Maxigesic*. "We wanted to provide people with a codeine-free painkiller option quite a few years back. The product has grown in popularity in New Zealand and it's now licensed in 125 different countries. To see a regulatory change here at home that will reduce instances of people becoming addicted to codeine is, we think, a very positive change."

Dr Atkinson says that the looming upscheduling change in Australia has been interesting from an industry perspective.

"Anecdotally there are some reports of people in Australia purchasing and stockpiling codeine-based painkillers before the 1 February upscheduling. But our experience has been that consumers have now begun the shift to non-codeine alternatives ahead of this date. We work directly with a lot of pharmacies across the different states and slowly but surely the consumer shift to non-codeine alternatives is underway which in turn is leading to increased orders of *Maxigesic*."

AFT Pharmaceuticals is also in the midst of launching a phenylephrine-based version of *Maxigesic* this year in New Zealand, to be known as *Maxigesic PE*, for the treatment of cold and flu symptoms. "This is important as it starts to extend the *Maxigesic* range," said Dr Atkinson.

Filings for *Maxigesic IV* (intravenous), for use primarily in hospitals, was also completed on schedule prior to Christmas. AFT is also currently filing for *Maxigesic IV* registration approval across multiple jurisdictions.

"In addition, new out-licensing agreements are in the process of due diligence and further announcements are expected over the next few months," said Dr Atkinson.

End of release

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