



Department of Health,  
P.O. Box 5013,  
Wellington.

26 May 1976.

## CLINICAL SERVICES LETTER NO. 159

### TO MEDICAL AND DENTAL PRACTITIONERS

(Copy to Proprietors of Retail Pharmacies)

#### Pharmaceutical Benefits: Special Approvals

Practitioners are reminded that when applying on behalf of a patient for a special supply of a medicine at the cost of public funds, the following information is essential in support of the application:

1. Name of patient.
2. Brief clinical particulars (the diagnosis alone is often sufficient).
3. Name of medicine required, together with a statement that, after a suitable preliminary trial, it has been found to have distinct advantages over previous therapy.
4. An indication by the practitioner that it would be unreasonable for the patient to have to pay for the medicine in question.

Objections are frequently made to this requirement. The fact is, however, that the whole principle of approving a special supply at the cost of public funds turns on this question. Most of these medicines are expensive, and often a suitable and cheaper alternative is available; the practitioner should therefore have little difficulty in deciding whether or not it would be reasonable to expect that patient to pay for the supply.

5. Signature of the practitioner, together with printed name and address.

We are sometimes asked for an endorsed prescription or an approval number to be sent direct to the patient. This can lead to difficulties, for the name or address of the patient may be hard to decipher, and some of these approvals have gone astray. We find it safer, therefore, to post the approvals to the practitioner whose name and address is usually printed on the application, or can be verified from the Medical or Dental Registers.

When an application is received which does not show the practitioner's name or address, or has been written from a public hospital, and in addition the practitioner's signature is illegible, we are in real trouble.

## **Smaller Packs of Narcotics**

There is an increasing number of pharmacy burglaries each year; narcotics are the medicines most often stolen. Following representations by the Pharmaceutical Society and the Chemists' Guild general agreement has been reached on the supply of smaller packs of narcotics to retail pharmacies. These packs are more suitable for the immediate needs of pharmacists than the larger packs available previously.

In future most narcotics will be supplied in small unit packs. This move, combined with a programme of reducing existing stocks, should make pharmacies a less attractive target for the seeker of medicines for illicit use.

Medical practitioners will rarely be inconvenienced by the new arrangements; but, depending on local circumstances, they may find it advisable to order narcotics required on practitioners' supply orders a few days in advance.

## **Labelling of Medicines**

On 1 June 1976 the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand will introduce its cautionary and advisory labelling scheme. The aims of the scheme are to prevent or allay adverse reactions to medicines, to warn of important side-effects, to improve patient compliance, and to reduce medication errors. The labels used will supplement the instructions given by prescribers. If in a particular case a prescriber does not wish a cautionary label to be used the prescription should be endorsed "N.C.L." (No Cautionary Label). It is hoped this endorsement will be used as little as possible.

The Pharmaceutical Society is to be complimented in taking the initiative in introducing this important scheme, and also the Chemists' Guild of New Zealand for arranging the administrative details. An explanatory booklet is available to practitioners from the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand, P.O. Box 9249, Wellington.

## **Medical Benefits—Group Therapy**

On the recommendation of the Medical Services Advisory Committee and, after discussion with the Medical Association of New Zealand and the New Zealand Branch of the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, an increased rate of benefit is to be implemented for group therapy.

For groups of three or more patients, medical benefits at the rates for consultations in normal hours are payable, up to a maximum of \$18 for a 1-hour session. This rate includes some allowance for preparation and post-group assessment and is to apply to both general practitioners and specialists. General practitioners will not be entitled to claim extended time in addition.

The higher rate is effective for groups treated on or since 1 April 1976.

## **Barium Meal and Follow Through**

Examinations of the colon attempted by the oral route are inaccurate and quite unreliable. In some circumstances the examination of the small intestine can require a different technique from the stomach and duodenum. It is possible that both the referring practitioner and his patient may believe that a request for a barium meal and "follow through" has resulted in a complete and thorough examination of the alimentary tract from mouth to anus when the radiologist concerned may well have carried out, in good faith, a much lesser procedure. To avoid ambiguity it is strongly recommended that this terminology be avoided when making X-ray requests and that a precise indication be given as to which area is to be examined, such as "oesophagus, stomach, and duodenum", "small intestine", or "colon by barium enema".

## **Queen Mary Hospital, Hanmer Springs**

Since 1971 this hospital has concentrated on treating people who have a drinking problem. Patients are accepted from anywhere in New Zealand. Current treatment is based on a course of education, group therapy, and involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous.

Admissions can usually be arranged within a few days and a date can be given on receipt of a telephone call or a letter.

There is no specific admission form and a doctor's note giving full relevant details is all that is necessary.

## **Sleep Patterns of Infancy**

*Dr Neil C. Begg writes:*

"I have been reading about a Finnish pamphlet to mothers of young children called 'Sleep for Love', in which mothers are assured that a secure and stable relationship between mother and child will encourage a good sleeping habit. The confidence and trust which develops at an early age promotes relaxed sleep for both child and parent.

This is in contrast to a New Zealand approach, which some mothers have acquired, of giving their babies a sleeping draught to quieten them so that their restlessness does not interfere with the activities of others in the house. It seems that an increasing number of New Zealand babies are being fed elixir of promethazine hydrochloride, or other preparations, in a hypnotic dose so that they will be overcome by a deep sleep for many hours.

Sleeplessness or restlessness, is an age old and universal characteristic of some infants. There are various ways of treating it. If the baby is hungry, feeding or sucking is the affective terminator, and when hunger is not the cause rocking is most effective. The two may be differentiated by picking the baby up. If he stops crying he has been lonely or worried about his isolation from his mother. If he doesn't then he is hungry or physically uncomfortable.

Feeding or rocking are signs of the 'Love' discussed in the Finnish pamphlet. An understanding of the infant's needs and a desire to meet those needs are part of the business of parenthood. The giving of regular doses of hypnotics to infants is comparable to giving morphia for an undiagnosed abdominal pain.

It seems inappropriate for parents to buy promethazine or other medicines for the purpose of quietening their child. And on most occasions a doctor's prescription for strengthening the mother/child 'Attachment' is more helpful than one for a hypnotic.

In some cases, in special circumstances or on special occasions, drug induced sleep for an infant is necessary. But the regular treatment of a symptom without uncovering the cause, is not good medicine."

---

*D. A. Andrews*

(D. A. Andrews)  
Director,

*A. G. Scott*

(A. G. Scott)  
Deputy Director,

Division of Clinical Services.