

NZ gets drug that glows brain tumour

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Singapore: A novel drug, GLIOLAN (aminolevulinic acid HCl), that helps neurosurgeons to better visualise and remove malignant brain tumours has been approved for marketing and distribution in New Zealand by Medsafe.

The drug assists neurosurgeons to better visualise and more completely remove malignant brain tumours (gliomas) by causing them to become fluorescent and glow during surgery.

GLIOLAN is given to the patient as a drink three hours before surgery. During surgery, a neurosurgical microscope fitted with a specialised blue operating light is used, which causes cancerous tissue to glow fluorescent pink whilst normal brain tissue appears blue.

This enables neurosurgeons to better visualise these tumours and more completely remove them, without damaging the neighbouring healthy brain tissue.

GLIOLAN is indicated in adult patients for visualisation of malignant tissue during surgery for malignant gliomas that are glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) on preoperative imaging, and who are intended for resection of the tumour.

The drug will be made available in New Zealand by Australian based bio-pharmaceutical company Specialised Therapeutics (ST). ST has in-licensed the drug from German partner photonamic. According to New Zealand Ministry of Health 2012 figures, around 260 people in New Zealand are diagnosed with brain cancer each year, with nearly half of these being GBM.

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Mr Carlo Montagner, CEO, Specialised Therapeutics, said regulatory approval by Medsafe is the first step in having GLIOLAN broadly available for New Zealand patients with GBM.

"Our next step is to have this important drug reimbursed and listed on the Pharmaceutical Schedule in New Zealand as soon as possible, to make this high class compound available to all patients with GBM. GLIOLAN is already under consideration for reimbursement as a high priority by PHARMAC, the New Zealand reimbursement authority" he said.

"Using GLIOLAN for complicated brain tumour surgery can lead to substantially improved outcomes for patients, as it improves the chances of the tumour being more completely removed. In Australia, more than 230 patients have had their surgery done using GLIOLAN, where it has been approved since November 2013.

GLIOLAN was first approved in Europe in 2007 and is marketed by medac in Europe, Africa, South America and Asia (excepting Japan and Korea).