

Press release

Crunch meeting fails to clear new medicines logjam

Pharmaceutical companies are delivering huge savings but access to new medicines is worse

17/07/2017 (EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.01, MONDAY 17 July 2017)

Thousands of patients in Ireland, with serious conditions ranging from heart disease, cancer and skin condition are being denied access to nine new medicines that are routinely available across Europe.

This is despite the medicines having been through all HSE assessment processes and €140m in savings having been provided by member companies of the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) under its agreement with Government.

At a crunch meeting between IPHA and Government representatives last week, no assurance were given by the official side that the medicines currently stuck will be cleared.

Oliver O'Connor, CEO of IPHA said *"for the nine medicines it has been 2½ years on average from the time of the first application for reimbursements. It is 520 days since the outcome of the full Health Technology Assessment. This delay is inexcusable and is letting down patients."*

When the Government and IPHA concluded a new Agreement one year ago, the Minister for Health welcomed a new Agreement and indicated that *"the Government wants to ensure that Irish patients continue to have access to new and innovative medicines and that Ireland remains at the forefront of its European peers in terms of early access"*

Recently the Government launched a new Cancer Strategy which has the objective of putting Ireland to be in the top quartile in Europe in outcomes for cancer.

The Government is clearly failing on its own policy:

- No progress has been made on access to new and innovative medicines - instead they are routinely delayed and sent for political decision to the Minister for Health
- Ireland is certainly not at the forefront of European peers – instead we are lagging and getting worse
 - Ireland is 16th out of 26 countries in use of newly authorised medicines
 - other European countries make new medicines available to patients within 6-12 months of authorisation

Oliver O'Connor continued

“Last week, IPHA pointed out this failure of policy to the State’s Agreement negotiating team but no resolution was offered. There was no indication that anything would change in future.

“At that meeting IPHA pressed our analysis that the HSE had enough money in its 2017 budget to fund new medicines, given the €140m savings IPHA members have provided. We pointed out that Health was reported as underspent by €21m in the June Exchequer returns. No evidence was offered showing an inability to fund new medicines this year. Yet the delays continue.

“You certainly can’t bring the best treatments to cancer patients and others if you provide for no growth at all in the medicines budget.”

“The issue is not about pricing. The maximum prices in Ireland are the average of 14 other EU countries. Other countries in Europe have similar pricing and budget controls and yet they provide medicines much faster.

“Ireland can do better: patients can and should have faster access to new medicines. We are playing our part and will continue to do so, but that has to be reciprocated by new Government initiatives on process and budgets.

“There are no good reasons why Ireland should not provide medicines that are available to millions of Europeans already. We are the fastest growing economy in Europe and the Government wants to benchmark us against the best –so it’s time to make this happen for patients awaiting new medicines.

“IPHA urges the Government to take all necessary measures to speed up the medicines approval process, to avoid artificial delays and to provide funding to fulfil its own promise to the public to put Ireland at the forefront of its European peers in access to new medicines.”

“We call on Minister Harris to set out clear, practical policies on how he is going to deliver this promise to patients and how he is going to measure and report performance relative to European peers.”

ENDS

Notes for Editors

Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, Belgium, France, Finland, Italy, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, UK are all ahead of Ireland in terms of access to newly authorised medicines.

Contact Philip Hannon on 087 2870891