

13 February 2013

Dr Suzanne Hill
Chair
Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee
GPO Box 9848
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Dr Hill

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee on the major submission to list Eribulin Mesylate (Halaven®) for the treatment of patients with locally advanced or metastatic breast cancer who have progressed after at least two chemotherapy regimes for advanced disease.

About BCNA

BCNA is the peak national organisation for Australians personally affected by breast cancer. We empower, inform, represent and link together people whose lives have been affected by breast cancer. We work to ensure that women diagnosed with breast cancer and their families receive the very best information, treatment, care and support possible – no matter who they are or where they live.

BCNA currently represents more than 75,000 individual members and 325 Member Groups from across Australia. More than 95 per cent of our members have had a diagnosis of breast cancer, and the remaining members have had a personal experience with breast cancer through a family member or friend.

Our Submission

BCNA strongly supports the application for the listing of Eribulin Mesylate for the above purpose.

Approximately 4 per cent of our membership is women who have had a diagnosis of secondary (advanced) breast cancer. For these women, there are limited treatments. New treatments provide real benefits to women more than just extending life – just the *knowledge* that there are new and emerging treatments plays an important role in women's emotional wellbeing following their diagnosis.

Once I got over the initial shock of being diagnosed with secondary breast cancer, all I wanted to know was: 'Are there options and how many options are available to me?' ... My oncologist knows that my 'option' question will come up and he is always ready to say: 'Yes Tracey, there are still options available to you.' That is quite comforting for me to know. – Tracey A, BCNA member with secondary breast cancer

Eribulin Mesylate is a new chemotherapy that has been found in clinical trials to significantly increase both progression-free survival and overall survival in women with secondary breast cancer. It is used when women have failed on previous chemotherapy treatments, giving them an additional treatment option. It

appears to be well tolerated by women in terms of side effects, allowing them to maintain quality of life while on the treatment.

Further, although Eribulin Mesylate is delivered via IV infusion, the infusion time is short (five minutes), reducing the amount of time women are required to spend at the oncology clinic.

For all these reasons, BCNA strongly supports the inclusion of this new and beneficial drug on the PBS.

It is important that it is PBS-listed and thus subsidised by the Australian Government. Breast cancer is an expensive disease and many women incur high out-of-pocket costs for their treatment and ongoing care. For women with secondary breast cancer, there is often added financial stress as they are unable to work, or may have to work reduced hours, because of their disease.

Since my diagnosis (with secondary breast cancer), we are more than \$15,000 out of pocket. I can't work anymore, so we live on my husband's salary and we constantly 'rob Peter to pay Paul'. The financial strain hugely compounds the stress of dealing with cancer. – Tracey R, BCNA member with secondary breast cancer

Thank you for considering our submission. If you have any comments or enquiries, please contact me at kwells@bcna.org.au or on 03 9805 2562.

Yours sincerely

Kathy Wells
Acting Policy Manager