

Project report

EXPLORING THE EXTENT AND SCOPE OF MEDICINES ACCESS PROGRAMS TO CANCER MEDICINES IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

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We would like to acknowledge the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia for their support with this project in distributing the link to the survey to its member. We thank you for that. Below is a summary of the project. We will be delighted to send you a copy of the publication when it's ready.

Introduction

Medicines Access Programs (MAP) offer access to new and unfunded medicines, at the discretion of pharmaceutical companies, to patients with cancer. Despite growing interest from stakeholders, there are no regulations for their informed use and limited literature on their extent and scope in Australia and New Zealand (NZ).

Aims

To identify MAPs and their characteristics for cancer medicines that were/are operational in 2014-2015 in Australia and NZ. To explore the views of key stakeholders on MAPs.

Method

A preliminary list of MAPs was developed through purposeful sampling of stakeholders and reviewing applications for subsidy to Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee between July 2013 and June 2015. That list was subsequently sent to hospital pharmacists in Australia and NZ to validate and elucidate further information. Pharmaceutical companies were contacted directly to provide information regarding MAPs offered. Key pharmacists, oncologists, policy makers, consumers, consumer groups and Medicines Australia were interviewed to identify issues with MAPs. Descriptive thematic analysis was employed.

Results

Forty MAPs for cancer medicines were identified, covering a range of indications, the majority of which were provided cost-free to the patient. Variability in the availability and implementation of MAPs across institutions was observed. Australia offered more MAPs than NZ. Only 2 of 18 pharmaceutical companies contacted agreed to participate. Eight stakeholder interviews were conducted identifying lack of pharmacovigilance, inequity to access, operational issues and lack of transparency as the major issues with MAPs.

Conclusion

MAPs are widely operational despite several issues with their implementation. There is lack of transparency from pharmaceutical companies. Results suggest need for a standardised and binding policy to mitigate issues with MAPs.