

The Common Drug Review, Reality Check

by: Linda Wilhelm

The concept of one National drug review process sounds great: One process for all provinces (Quebec has opted out), streamlined, more efficient, and eliminating duplication. The result should be universal, timely access to new medications for all Canadians. As difficult as it is for us to understand, The Canadian Coordinating Office for Technology Assessment (CCOHTA) has implemented The Common Drug Review (CDR) but it will not result in timely nor universal access to new medications.

The whole purpose of the CDR seems to be cost containment, not improving the health of patients. Restricting access to new best medicines appears to be the goal and they are in sight of reaching it. The Best Medicines Coalition in collaboration with Canadian Treatment Action Council and Consumer Advocare Network, have forwarded a position paper to CCOHTA with recommendations to improve on their current process, to make it acceptable to the millions of consumers living with chronic disease. They were thanked for their input however, out of the 20 recommendations submitted to make the process work for patients, only two were accepted.

The review process is seriously flawed. And the CDR is doing nothing to improve it - in fact it is making it worse, causing further delays in accessing new therapeutic treatments. To date, they have reviewed 27 new drugs and approved only six. To be clear, the drugs that CDR reviews have already been through rigorous approval by Health Canada and have been proven to be effective treatments.

To make the CDR work, a Consumer Advisory Committee that has meaningful input into the process is needed. There must be accountability and commitment that access to new medications will be timely, the goal not exceeding the current best provincial listing time. Advocating for revision to the CDR is paramount. Without changes, the health of Canadians will be further compromised. For more details, please visit: www.bestmedicines.ca

For information on Common Drug Review: www.ccohta.ca/CDR/cdr_faq_e.ASP