



October 26, 2011

The Honorable Gary D. Alexander
Department of Public Welfare
P.O. Box 2675
Harrisburg, PA 17105

Dear Secretary Alexander:

Collectively, we are writing in regard to the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare's Pharmacy & Therapeutics (P&T) Committee's planned review of 11 oral oncology medicines during its scheduled November 9, 2011, meeting in Harrisburg. As the President of the Pennsylvania Society of Oncology and Hematology, an organization representing over three hundred physicians, nurses, and professionals all dedicated to the treatment of cancer we are taking this opportunity to express our concern and the concerns of multiple statewide provider, patient and advocacy groups on the proposed review of oral oncology medications. PSOH and the above listed organizations are frequently called upon to comment on state-based policy and legislation.

We are concerned that by adding oncology drugs to the P&T Committee's review, the State will begin to restrict access to cancer medicines for Medicaid Fee-for-Service program patients. We are also concerned that there are no oncologists on the P&T Committee.

Oncology drugs, even those within a group of drugs treating the same tumor type, are not interchangeable. These drugs often have different mechanisms of action, different side effects, and could be targeted to different sub-populations within a tumor type. Additionally, oncologists recommend treatment based on the expected clinical benefit for the particular patient's clinical profile. Establishing barriers restricts our ability to make the best medical decision for the care of our patients who are facing a life threatening illness.

Medicaid cancer patients already have poorer survival rates than patients who are commercially insured. Restricting access to necessary medication might only exacerbate these disparities. We are also concerned about Medicaid patients living in rural areas. Oral drugs are a more convenient way for them to receive therapy than requiring them to travel great distances, particularly when they are very ill.

Collectively, we urge the Department of Public Welfare to reconsider its decision to review oral oncology drugs. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted by the following patient and provider advocate organizations on behalf of their Pennsylvania chapters and/or constituents.

Eliot L. Friedman, MD
President Pennsylvania Society of Oncology and Hematology

Supporting Organizations

- Pennsylvania Society of Oncology and Hematology
- Pennsylvania Breast Cancer Coalition
- Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
- Premier Oncology Hematology Management Society
- Gilda's Club of Delaware Valley
- Gilda's Club of Western Pennsylvania
- Cancer Support Community
- The American Liver Foundation
- The Kidney Foundation of Central PA
- Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
- Lung Cancer Alliance
- American Lung Association of Pennsylvania

Individual Support

- Margaret Quinn Rosenzweig, PhD, FNP-BC, AOCNP

cc: Dr. Eli N. Avila
Members of the P & T Committee
Vincent Gordon, Deputy Secretary, Office of Medical Assistance Programs
Terri Cathers, Pharmacy Director, Office of Medical Assistant