

July 16, 2010

The Honorable Harriet Dichter
Department of Public Welfare
P.O. Box 2675
Harrisburg, PA 17105
104A East Wing
P.O. Box 202072
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2072

Dear Secretary Dichter:

I am writing on behalf of the Pennsylvania Society of Oncology and Hematology (PSOH) 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 August 26, 2010, meeting in Harrisburg. PSOH represents over three hundred physicians, nurses, and professionals all dedicated to the treatment of cancer. Our membership is statewide and we 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.

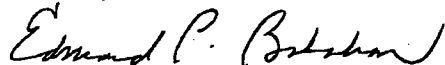
Oncology drugs, even those within a group of drugs treating the same tumor type, are not interchangeable. These drugs often have different mechanisms of action, different side effects, and could be targeted to different sub-populations within a tumor type. Additionally, oncologists recommend treatment 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.

The Pennsylvania Society of Oncology & Hematology asks the Department of Public Welfare to reconsider its decision to review oral oncology drugs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Edward P. Balaban, DO
President

Cc: Members of the P & T Committee
Mike Nardone, Deputy Secretary for Office of Medical Assistance
Terri Cathers, Pharmacy Director, Office of Medical Assistant