**Improving Coverage for Individuals with Osteoporosis in BC – How You can Help**

If you are an individual in British Columbia who has been diagnosed with osteoporosis or is at high risk of fracture, you are not being treated fairly. A recent report card rating seven provinces – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland – shows that access to treatments and to bone mineral density testing in BC is the worst in Canada.

Oral bisphosphonates are more easily accessible with fewer restrictions in all provinces except BC. Here a patient must have had a broken bone from osteoporosis to be eligible for reimbursement. Not being able to take an oral bisphosphonate because of difficulty swallowing or issues with your stomach or intestines does not qualify you for coverage by a different treatment. If your bone mineral density goes down or you have a broken bone while taking an oral bisphosphonate, you still do not qualify for another treatment.

BC is the only province where health professionals must fill out a special authorization form for any osteoporosis treatment. Often there is a four-month delay in dealing with these forms, a delay that could result in serious problems, like a broken bone or increased anxiety.

Broken bones are the main consequence of osteoporosis and they can be devastating. At least one in three women and one in five men will suffer a broken bone from osteoporosis during their lifetime. The population is aging – by 2036 probably 25% of the population will be 65 or over. Since age is a risk factor, there will likely be an increase in broken bones as well.

Broken bones can cause acute and chronic pain; they can interfere with your mobility and independence; you fear falling so you limit your activities and become more socially isolated and depressed. Hip fractures can mean going to a long-term care home. Complications arising from a hip fracture can even lead to death. In spite of clear guidelines, screening and treatment rates after a broken bone in Canada are very low. Fewer than 20% of fracture patients are diagnosed, have a bone mineral density test or receive treatment after a fracture.

BC Pharmacare, the provincial body that defines eligibility, is undergoing a review of its policies regarding osteoporosis treatment, the first since 2008. **This is your chance to make a difference.** The BC Ministry of Health has created a survey for patients, caregivers and patient groups to provide feedback. This survey will take about 15-20 minutes. It asks questions such as how does osteoporosis affect your daily life; which bisphosphonates, or other osteoporosis medication, have you used and what was your experience; and has Pharmacare coverage or limits on coverage affected your choice of medication and if so, how. The survey is easy to complete and there is help on how to do so and submit it. It is open from October 20 to November 17. You can access the survey at surveymoh.health.gov.bc.ca/public/survey/therapeutic-review-drugs-used-primary-prevention-osteoporosis.

**Please send this information to friends and relatives with osteoporosis or who act as caregivers. Together we can make a difference and improve osteoporosis care in BC.**

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