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GACM:ks

19th February, 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

RE: INQUIRY INTO CONSUMER ACCESS TO PHARMACEUTICAL BENEFITS

**Bisphosphonates:- Creation of therapeutic group for purposes of drug
interchangability**

As a practitioner of over the thirty years standing, engaged in the treatment of patients with bone and joint diseases, I am concerned about the proposal that the differences between bisphosphonates are so minor that the various drugs in this class can be regarded as being interchangeable.

I am particularly concerned on the basis of safety and the emerging issue that bisphosphonates paradoxically, rather than prevent fractures, may actually lead to an increased risk of femoral (thigh bone) fractures. As the risk of such fractures seems to be preferentially linked to bisphosphonates with a high binding affinity and long duration of effect, I am concerned that as a consequence of this determination, I will no longer, by virtue of a cost obstacle, be able to prescribe the most appropriate bisphosphonate to my patients, most of whom are of limited financial means, and that I may be putting them at risk.

The effects of a fractured hip on an elderly person are properly recognised to be truly devastating, and the prevention of these fractures is rightly the paramount goal of osteoporosis management. It would be an irony therefore to be forced to use drugs that may prove to have the paradoxical side effect of after some years of treatment actually creating a situation where patients are at risk of sustaining fractures of the femoral shaft, with equally devastating effects.

I ask therefore for consideration of these matters and request that approval for implementation of the proposal be withheld.

Yours sincerely

GABOR MAJOR
DIRECTOR
DEPARTMENT OF RHEUMATOLOGY