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VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

Distribution:

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Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert

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Update re Drug Program Changes (Bill 102)

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is slowly moving ahead with the significant changes to Ontario’s drug system brought by the approval of Bill 102 in October 2006. While there are still many unknowns including how drugs for people with MS will be made available, more information has been made available recently about how the programs will work.

Ontario Drug Formulary – Since October, the Ontario government has been reviewing the thousands of drugs on the current formulary to determine what drugs should be kept, which ones added and which removed. Since October, more than 20 new drugs have been added to the formulary.

Conditional Listing – This is a new category under the legislation. Conditional listing provides a mechanism for the Ministry of Health to negotiate with drug manufacturers the price and criteria for the appropriate use of drugs. Conditional listing drugs can be included on the drug formulary but with specific restrictions for use.

Section 8 Status – One of the goals of the legislation is to make the exceptional access category truly limited unlike the catch-all that the previous Section 8 process had become. Ministry staff have been reviewing the drugs currently available under Section 8 with the objective of moving them to the full drug formulary, to conditional listing, to a much smaller exceptional access category or delisting. Recently, four of the top prescribed drugs has been moved to conditional listing because of negotiated agreements with drug manufacturers. This means doctors can now prescribe them without having to write letters or fill out forms for approval by the Ministry of Health. Ministry staff are working on similar agreements on the other Section 8 drugs. The four currently available disease-modifying MS therapies are Section 8 drugs and will continue to be available under that process until evaluated. No timeline is available for the evaluation at this time.

Rapid Review – The legislation also allows the Ministry of Health to review drugs for possible funding in Ontario before they receive Health Canada approval on effectiveness and safety. To be considered for rapid review, drugs must treat life-threatening conditions, provide a substantial improvement to quality of life and/or substantial savings to the province.

Deanna Groetzinger is a member of a task force to develop criteria vis-à-vis qualifications and training for the new “patient” members of the committee that will recommend which drugs should be included on the drug formulary. The next meeting is scheduled for March. In addition, the MS Society is in close touch with the Ministry for information especially in light of Health Canada’s approval of Tysabri (natalizumab), another disease modifying MS therapy last year.

Update re Tysabri (natalizumab)

The newest disease-modifying therapy Tysabri (natalizumab) is now being prescribed and given to people with MS who fit the prescribing criteria. Health Canada approved Tysabri in late September 2006 as a treatment for relapsing MS. The general prescribing indication for Tysabri is for people with MS who have had an inadequate response to other disease modifying therapies or are unable to tolerate them.

While private and group insurers are reimbursing the cost of Tysabri, as yet no provincial drug program has made a decision as to whether it will be reimbursed. Most are waiting for the recommendation from the federal/provincial/territorial agencies that examines the cost-effectiveness of new drugs. The first provincial decision will probably not be made until late spring.

Long Term Care Reform and Finding My Place

John Clifford, chair of the Ontario Government and Community Social Action Committee, and Deanna Groetzinger, vice-president, Government Relations and Policy, presented recommendations on age-appropriate long-term care in mid January during hearings held by the Standing Committee on Social Policy on Bill 140. The proposed legislation would bring about significant change to how Ontario’s long-term care is delivered. However, the legislation makes no mention of age-appropriate care, which we believe is a significant oversight. By their remarks and questions, several committee members demonstrated

insight into MS, expressed support of the MS Society position and requested a copy of the MS Society position paper on age-appropriate long-term care, *Finding My Place*.

We will continue to follow the progress of Bill 140 and look for further opportunities for input. The MS Society presentation on Bill 140 is available at http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario/pdf/ont-LongTermCare-brief_20070117.pdf. A copy of *Finding My Place* is available at <http://www.mssociety.ca/en/pdf/ont-LongTermCare-findingmyplace-apr06.pdf>

Update re Human Rights (Bill 107)

The Ontario Legislature approved Bill 107, the legislation that amends the human rights code, December 5, 2006 and received Royal Assent on December 20, however, it has not yet proclaimed into force. It is anticipated that this will occur within the next few months. The MS Society provided input to this controversial legislation from start to finish and was pleased that the final legislation reflected a number of our recommendations to improve it. Essentially the legislation brings about four key changes: removes the Human Rights Commission's role in determining which complaints should go to a Human Rights Tribunal hearing; provides individuals with direct access in bringing forward complaints to the Human Rights Tribunal; establishes a Human Rights Legal Support Centre to assist people in making human rights complaints; and redefines the Human Rights Commission's role to investigate and pursue systemic human rights violations.

Key among the amendments is the establishment in the legislation of a Human Rights Legal Support Centre. The centre is crucial in providing the necessary legal assistance to individuals with human rights complaints to move the complaint through the system. Other important amendments which led to the MS Society's qualified endorsement are the removal of user fees for complainants and the strengthening of the Human Rights Commission's investigative powers of systemic human rights issues.

We will continue to monitor the progress of the changes to the human rights system. A copy of the MS Society presentation to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy is posted at http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario/pdf/ont-humanrts-brief-toronto_20061123.pdf

Your Input Invited – Ontario's Plan for Health

When the Ontario government passed the Local Health System Integration Act in March 2006, it was required to develop a health care plan that includes a vision, priorities and strategic directions for the health system to bring about a stronger health care system. Public input is being invited into the development of the health care plan. MS Society, Ontario Division, staff have participated in one consultation session and others are being held across the provinces. This is a great opportunity to bring forward MS Society key priorities about health care including the need for more and better home care, the need for age-appropriate long-term care, quicker access for MS drug therapies.

For more information about these key priorities, please contact Deanna Groetzinger at: Deanna.groetzinger@mssociety.ca; phone: 1-800-268-7582, ext. 3007; or fax: 416-922-7538. The Ministry of Health consultation website is: www.ourplanforhealth.ca/moh

New Tuition Policy and Supports for Students with Disabilities

The government of Ontario announced February 1 that it is changing its university and college tuition policy to assist students with disabilities and will provide funding to colleges and universities so they can provide more direct supports and services to students with disabilities. The government is planning to cap tuition fees for students with permanent disabilities if they have to take longer to complete their programs. Interested students can contact the guidance offices at their high schools, colleges or universities. More information is available at

<http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2007/02/01/c3708.html?lmatch=&lang=e.html>

New MS Society Scholarship Program

The MS Society has launched its first-ever post-secondary scholarship program for students who have MS or who have a parent with MS. The deadline for applications is April 15, 2007. For more information, go to <http://www.mssociety.ca/en/help/scholarship.htm>

Government Relations/ Social Action Workshop

Making a Difference Today, the first chapter/ unit government relations training workshop in Ontario Division, will take place April 28 and 29 in Toronto. Registration information has been distributed to all chapters and units. Deadline for registration is March 26. For more information call the Chapter Support Line: 1-866-399-9828 or e-mail

ontchaptersupport@mssociety.ca

Arch Alert Available Online

The February issue of Arch Alert is available at

http://www.archdisabilitylaw.ca/publications/archAlert/2007/15_feb09/index.asp

Published by the ARCH Disability Law Centre, it provides updates about recent legal issues of interest to people with disabilities. The MS Society of Canada is a member of ARCH.

Government Relations and Social Action E-Alerts Online

The Government Relations and Social Action Alert newsletter is available online. Just go to www.mssociety.ca/ontario and click on Government Relations & Social Action/ Social Action Alert.

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