



THE AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF DERMATOLOGISTS

MEDIA RELEASE: AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF DERMATOLOGISTS

8 April 2004

GST ON SKIN TREATMENT IS MAKING AUSTRALIANS SICK

Australian doctors have called for the GST to be scrapped on some medical treatments in order to make therapy more affordable for long-term sufferers.

Dermatologist, Professor Robin Marks, says some eczema sufferers are spending more than \$2000 a year just managing their condition, money many of them are struggling to find.

“Prescriptions, although subsidised, still incur considerable costs. Something as simple, effective and essential to eczema management as moisturiser, attracts a tax. By removing moisturiser from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) it now attracts GST. This is despite the Government’s stated policy of excluding medical needs from the GST.”

The latest *Australasian Journal of Dermatology* reveals that eczema patients on average spent \$425 a year on managing their condition.

Professor Marks, who carried out the study, said the amount spent varied with the severity of the disease and could have as much financial impact as that experienced by patients with diabetes.

“It is not uncommon for these patients to be over \$2,000 out of pocket in the course of the year,” he said.

Professor Marks said atopic eczema was a common disease affecting up to one in three preschoolers and 7% of adults.

It is characterised by dry, red, scaly skin which is intensely itchy. Sufferers often find sleep difficult with resultant disruption of the entire family. It can be life long, there is no cure and treatment is costly and time-consuming.

“People suffering from eczema are in the unique position of having to pay GST on their treatment”, explained Professor Marks.

“Previously, moisturisers were bought on prescription and subsidised by the PBS but now that they are bought over the counter they not only are no longer subsidised – they also attract GST. A double whammy!” Professor Marks said. “A person with severe eczema can easily get through a 100gm tube of moisturiser in a day which adds up to a major expense over a year.

“Management of atopic eczema places enormous financial, physical and emotional demands on our patients and their families,” he said. “They lose time from work or school, they need to purchase special clothing and bedding and most cannot tolerate ordinary soaps and shampoos.”

END

To arrange an interview, please contact:

Ros Warnes

Australasian College of Dermatologists

136 Pittwater Road, Gladesville NSW 2111

Phone: 1300 361 821

Fax: (02) 9816 1174

Email: ros@dermcoll.asn.au

The Eczema Association is also available for interviews. Contact Cheryl Talent on:

Email: itchy@eczema.org.au

Phone: (07) 3821 3297