



## Health Newsflash

### Iressa



#### *New Drug:*

**Iressa** [*Ere-ress-ah*] (250 mg gefitinib), manufactured by AstraZeneca Canada Inc., was issued a conditional Notice of Compliance on December 17, 2003 by Health Canada.<sup>1</sup> It is available as an oral tablet and given once daily for treating patients with non-small cell lung cancer. Iressa was approved in the U.S. on May 5, 2003 and AstraZeneca's plan is to market this drug immediately in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Iressa is the first of a new class of drugs called tyrosine kinase inhibitors used to treat lung cancer. Lung cancer is the most preventable of all human cancers and remains the leading cause of cancer death for both sexes in 2003. In 2003, an estimated 21,100 Canadians (12,100 men; 9,000 women) will be diagnosed with lung cancer and 18,800 (10,900 men; 7,900 women) will die of it.<sup>3</sup>

Iressa's place in therapy will be third line after failure of other cancer treatments, all of which are currently administered into the vein by a health care professional in a hospital or at an outpatient cancer clinic. Therefore, private drugs plans will incur an incremental (additive) cost for the treatment of lung cancer when Iressa is used.

The manufacturer's price per tablet is \$71.33. With wholesaler and pharmacy markups, the cost impact to private payer plans is estimated to be approximately \$17,000 per patient based upon a median survival rate of 7 months.<sup>4</sup>

ESI Canada's Drug Evaluation Committee will be reviewing this drug at its January 2004 meeting.

1. Health Canada website (explains conditional Notice of Compliance):  
[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/tpd-dpt/noccfactsheet2002\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/tpd-dpt/noccfactsheet2002_e.html)
2. U.S. Food and Drug Administration and AstraZeneca Iressa websites:  
<http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/infopage/iressa> and <http://www.iressa.com/>
3. Canadian Cancer Society website: [http://www.cancer.ca/ccs/internet/standard/0,3182,3172\\_14459\\_langid-en,00.html](http://www.cancer.ca/ccs/internet/standard/0,3182,3172_14459_langid-en,00.html)
4. Kris MG, Natale RB, Herbst RS et al. Efficacy of Gefitinib, an Inhibitor of the Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor Tyrosine Kinase, in Symptomatic Patients With Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer: A Randomized Trial. *JAMA* 2003;290:2149-2158.

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*Redefining  
Health Claims  
Solutions*

*Volume 5  
Issue 22*

*Dec. 19,  
2003*



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