

Plain English Summary

Olaparib for treating BRCA-mutated HER2-negative early breast cancer

What does the guidance say?

Olaparib is recommended for listing on the Medication Assistance Fund (MAF) for government funding for patients with BRCA-mutated HER2-negative early breast cancer.

What is BRCA-mutated HER2-negative breast cancer?

Breast cancer occurs when abnormal cells grow uncontrollably in the ducts or lobes of the breast and spread into the surrounding breast tissue. When cancer is found only in the breast or nearby lymph nodes and has not spread to other parts of the body, this is known as early breast cancer.

The first treatment for breast cancer is often surgery to remove it. Some patients may have drug treatments such as chemotherapy or hormone therapy before surgery to help shrink the cancer and make it easier to remove. This is called neoadjuvant treatment. After surgery, patients may need to take other treatments to destroy any remaining cancer cells and reduce the risk of the breast cancer coming back. This type of treatment given after surgery is known as adjuvant therapy.

Doctors may order tests to see if the cancer cells have any biomarkers or genetic mutations that might help some treatments work better than others. Cancer cells that have a mutation in the BRCA genes can be treated with targeted therapies.

Some breast cancer cells have too much of a protein (receptor) called HER2 (human epidermal growth factor receptor 2) on the surface of their cells which encourages the cancer cells to divide and grow. This is known as HER2-positive breast cancer. If diagnostic tests show that cancer cells do not have a high level of the HER2 protein, this is known as HER2-negative breast cancer.

What is olaparib?

Olaparib belongs to a group of targeted medicines called PARP inhibitors. PARP (poly-ADP-ribose polymerase) is a protein (enzyme) that helps damaged cells repair themselves. PARP inhibitors stop PARP from working in cancer cells that have BRCA mutations and cause the cancer cells to die.

Olaparib is used as adjuvant treatment after surgery to destroy any remaining cancer cells. It is taken orally. Your doctor will tell you how much you need to take and how long you need to take it for.

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Who can have olaparib?

Patients with BRCA-mutated HER2-negative early breast cancer can have olaparib if they have previously been treated with neoadjuvant or adjuvant chemotherapy. Treatment with olaparib should be stopped after one year.

Your doctor can advise if olaparib is a suitable treatment for you.

Why was olaparib recommended for funding?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Olaparib was recommended for funding because it is considered to be an acceptable use of healthcare resources at the price proposed by the company.

What does listing on MAF mean for me?

The MAF helps people pay for expensive treatments that are clinically effective and cost effective. If your doctor prescribes olaparib for you, and you meet the MAF criteria, your treatment cost will be subsidised by 40% to 75%.

Olaparib has also been included on the Cancer Drug List (CDL) and is claimable under MediShield Life. The subsidy class and MediShield Life claim limits are available at go.gov.sg/moh-cancer-drug-list.

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