MINISTRY OF BUSINESS, INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI

Robin Benson
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Ref: DOIA 2021-1458 9 March 2021

Dear Robin

I refer to your request dated 9 February for information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA):

1. *Please provide any and all details of MBIE and/or NZ government investigation, including dates and frequency of assessment, into treatment and/or mitigation of Covid19. Such treatments/mitigations may include the following examples:*
    a. *Hydroxychloroquine (also known as HCQ)*
    b. *Hydroxychloroquine in conjunction with zinc*
    c. *Ivermectin*
    d. *Vitamin D*
    e. *REGN-COV2*
    f. *LY-CoV555 (antibody)*
    g. *LY-CoV016 (antibody)*
    h. *Remdesivir*

2. *If there are no details pursuant to the above, why is this the case? Please provide a comprehensive response including logical and evidence supporting any such decisions to not undertake assessments as applicable.*

3. *If the MBIE is not the correct governmental agency to provide responses to the above, please outline which agency/agencies would be responsible as a matter of urgency.*

MBIE has not directly investigated or assessed medicines, treatments, or therapeutics for the purpose of treating COVID-19. The COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy, which was led by MBIE, was limited to assessing and purchasing safe and effective vaccines for New Zealand.

However, in support of the Government's broader COVID-19 response, MBIE funded three projects involving COVID-19 treatments through the COVID-19 Innovation Acceleration Fund. I have attached the public statements for the three projects:

- Douglas Pharmaceuticals: To evaluate whether hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) reduces the risk to frontline healthcare workers (HCW) of acquiring SARs-CoV-2 infection.
- South Pacific Sera: Therapeutic antibodies against SAR-CoV-2 for the treatment of COVID-19
- Victoria Link Limited: Tackling New Zealand's need for rapid access to anti-viral medication for the treatment of COVID-19

The Douglas Pharmaceuticals project supported the Heath Research Council's (HRC) proposed clinical trials into the use of hydroxychloroquine as a potential COVID-19 treatment. The project ended on 30 August 2020 as the HRC chose not to use hydroxychloroquine in their trials in response to emerging evidence from other international trials. You can find more information about those trials here: https://www.hrc.govt.nz/news-events/update-new-zealands-rapid-response-covid-19-clinical-trials

The Victoria Link project concluded on 20 October 2020. The South Pacific Sera project began on 11 January 2021 and is ongoing.

The full list of projects funded through the COVID-19 Innovation Acceleration Fund can be found here: https://www.mbie.govt.nz/science-and-technology/science-and-innovation/funding-information-and-opportunities/investment-funds/covid-19-innovation-acceleration-fund/

The Health Research Council will also have more information on the Government's assessments of COVID-19 treatments.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602. Please contact me if you wish to discuss any aspect of your request or this response.

Yours sincerely

Simon Rae
Manager, International Science Partnerships
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Annex: Project public statements

Douglas Pharmaceuticals: *To evaluate whether hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) reduces the risk to frontline healthcare workers (HCW) of acquiring SARs-CoV-2 infection.*

We seek to determine whether hydroxychloroquine, a treatment for malaria, is effective at reducing the risk to frontline healthcare workers of developing COVID-19. This is being done to help ensure that medical professionals we are available when needed to treat patients with COVID-19 in a hospital setting.

The clinical study is planned to start in the second half of 2020. Douglas are manufacturing the investigational products for this trial which will be sponsored by the Medical Research Institute of New Zealand (MRINZ).

South Pacific Sera: *Therapeutic antibodies against SAR-CoV-2 for the treatment of COVID-19*

Without a vaccine or an effective treatment, New Zealand remains vulnerable to COVID-19. This proposal will develop antibody technologies which can be given to individuals to reduce the risk of virus infection or provide treatment to lessen the impact of disease. Working in parallel with New Zealand's leading capability in viruses, immunology, vaccines, drug development and clinicians we will combine our unique biological capability with international experience to tailor a solution which is specific and effective to the SARS-CoV-2 virus to keep us safe at the border, protect our front line staff and vulnerable, and provide an effective treatment.

Victoria Link Limited: *Tackling New Zealand's need for rapid access to anti-viral medication for the treatment of COVID-19*

There are currently no anti-viral drugs specifically approved for treatment of COVID-19, but an international effort is underway to evaluate potential drugs in clinical trials. When an effective drug is identified, there will be heavy international demand. This project seeks to establish whether, in the case that access to an effective anti-viral drug in NZ is delayed, we can produce it in NZ, satisfy regulatory requirements and make this available for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. It unites world-class experts from NZ Universities, drug development capabilities of GlycoSyn at Callaghan Innovation, and guidance from clinicians, regulatory and drug sourcing experts.