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Insulin Glargine (Lantus) and Cancer Risk

In New Zealand there are approximately 170,000 people with diabetes equating to about 4% of the population, of whom 90% have Type 2 diabetes. The remainder have Type 1 diabetes, a condition that necessarily requires insulin treatment. Those with Type 2 diabetes may eventually also progress to require treatment with insulin at some stage.

Manufactured human insulin has been used for many years and its safety is without question. Recent information from several observational studies has raised the possibility of an association between a relatively new insulin analogue called insulin glargine (Lantus) and certain forms of cancer. Almost all participants in the main study from which this information was derived had Type 2 diabetes. It is suggested that these findings do not apply to those with Type 1 diabetes.

There is considerable debate as to whether this association is genuine. A large combined analysis of the best available databases worldwide is now planned to determine whether this association between Lantus and an increased cancer risk is real or not.

Unlike many other countries where Lantus is available for people with all types of diabetes, in New Zealand it is only subsidised for people with Type 1 diabetes who experience problems with low blood glucose levels (hypoglycaemia). Therefore the New Zealand Society for the Study of Diabetes recommends that people currently receiving Lantus should not stop their treatment. Anyone using Lantus who is concerned should discuss the situation with their general practitioner or specialist before making any changes to their treatment.

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