



MEDIA RELEASE

Under embargo until 11am, FEBRUARY 14, 2017

Interview opportunity: CEO and Founder of TheSocialMedwork, Mr Sjaak Vink, in Australia 14–15 Feb

New Hope for Australian patients during Ovarian Cancer Awareness month

In somewhat fortuitous timing, [TheSocialMedwork](#)—a new ‘Dallas Buyers Club’ style social enterprise that recently launched in Australia—is now able to help Australian ovarian cancer patients immediately access a new treatment that is currently only available in US hospitals.

The medicine only just received FDA approval on 19th December, and is for women with advanced ovarian cancer who have been treated with two or more chemotherapies and whose tumors have a specific gene mutation (deleterious BRCA).¹ More than half the patients in the clinical trials experienced complete or partial shrinkage of their tumours lasting an average of 9.2 months.²

Provided that there is a doctor’s prescription and that the medicine is for personal use, TheSocialMedwork is able to import the drug for patients via the TGA’s [personal importation scheme](#), based on an Act that has been around since 1989, but has not been widely utilised—perhaps because patients are unaware of its existence, or because of the extremely complex process involved in arranging for a single medicine to be imported for a single patient.

An estimated 1,550 Australians will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer this year,³ with approximately 15 to 20% of ovarian cancer patients possessing the BRCA gene mutation.⁴ As symptoms are nonspecific and vague, unfortunately in most cases the cancer is quite advanced at the time of diagnosis.

“Recurrent ovarian cancer is one of the most difficult cancers to treat, and so unfortunately medical advances in this field have been limited,” said Mr Sjaak Vink, co-founder and CEO of the patient-health start up. “The US’s recent approval of this medicine represents an important advance for patients in this situation, and helping interested Australian patients and doctors access to this latest treatment right away will hopefully save lives.”

Mr Vink set up the www.thesocialmedwork.com along with two other founders after witnessing two friends die in quick succession, who could have been treated more successfully had they been able to access newly overseas approved patients. The Netherlands based company has already helped patients in US, Europe, and China through similar personal importation laws and has received requests of support from 61 countries and counting. They are also able to import a drug for Australians with advanced soft tissue sarcoma—a very rare cancer affecting 1,500 Australians each

¹ <http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm533873.htm>

² Ibid.

³ <https://ovarian-cancer.canceraustralia.gov.au/statistics#fn1>

⁴ <https://ovariancancer.net.au/awareness/genetic-risks/>



year. The drug was also only recently made available in the US in October, and in combination with a drug called doxorubicin, almost doubled survival rates compared to people who were treated with doxorubicin alone.⁵

“Given that it can currently take up to three years for an FDA approved drug to receive TGA approval, the fact that TheSocialMedwork can help interested patients access these latest treatments *now* is a huge game changer for Australians, who simply don’t have time to wait around,” says Steve Mason, CEO of the [Australian Patients Association](#).

TheSocialMedwork has also recently listed four new medicines on their product page (www.thesocialmedwork.com/shop/) that have just been approved and aren’t yet available in Australia to their website and intends to add many more in the coming months, making them accessible to Australia literally days after they’ve received American or European approval.

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To learn more, please visit <http://www.thesocialmedwork.com/>, or contact Blue Planet Public Relations:

- Andie Crawford - andie.crawford@blueplanetpr.com.au or 0467 029 780 OR
- Maraya Bell - maraya.bell@blueplanetpr.com.au or 0419 163 976 OR
- Sophie Blue - sophie.blue@blueplanetpr.com.au or 0416 006 821

⁵ <http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm525878.htm>