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WHO prioritises diabetes, cancer treatments in Essential Medicines Lists

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The World Health Organisation (WHO) has published the new edition of its Model Lists of Essential Medicines and Essential Medicines for Children, which include new treatments for various cancers, insulin analogues and new oral medicines for diabetes, new medicines to assist people who want to stop smoking, and new antimicrobials to treat serious bacterial and fungal infections.

The listings aim to address global health priorities, identifying the medicines that provide the greatest benefits, and which should be available and affordable for all. However, high prices for both new, patented medicines and older medicines, like insulin, continue to keep some essential medicines out of reach for many patients.

The list includes Sodium-Glucose Co-transporter-2 (SGLT2) inhibitors empagliflozin, canagliflozin and dapagliflozin as second line therapy in adults with type 2 diabetes.

Four new medicines for cancer treatment were added to the model lists. They are Enzalutamide, as an alternative to abiraterone, for prostate cancer; Everolimus, for subependymal giant cell astrocytoma (SEGA), a type of brain tumour in children; Ibrutinib, a targeted medicine for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia; and Rasburicase, for tumour lysis syndrome, a serious complication of some cancer treatments.

The listing for imatinib was extended to include targeted treatment of leukaemia. New childhood cancer indications were added for 16 medicines already listed, including for low-grade glioma, the most common form of a brain tumour in children.