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Targeting rheumatoid arthritis – New hope with smart drug Rituximab

Interim study results indicate rituximab may help improve lives of people with Rheumatoid Arthritis

Encouraging new interim Phase II study results indicate that biologically engineered drug rituximab is effective in fighting Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA). The Phase II study is an international, multi-center, double-blind trial investigating rituximab alone or in combination with other therapies in RA. Final safety and efficacy results are expected later this year and in the meantime Roche, Genentech and IDEC are working closely together to pursue a global clinical phase III development plan for the further study of Rituximab in RA.

In an earlier exploratory trial conducted in 1999, rituximab was shown to be effective in relieving symptoms in patients with RA who had failed to respond to existing therapies.

In 2000 there were 5.8 million patients worldwide with RA. Of the 5.8 million patients worldwide with RA in 2000 (6 million in 2010), 4.1 million were drug treated (4.2 million drug treated in 2010). There is no cure for RA but it is hoped that eventually rituximab will be proven to help improve the lives of those afflicted.

RA is a debilitating disease that hinders the daily activities of sufferers. In Europe, RA affects up to 2 million people. It is characterised by inflammation of multiple joints, cartilage loss and bone erosion, which leads to joint destruction and ultimately reduced joint function. Additionally, since RA is a systematic disease, it can have effects in other tissues, such as lungs, eyes and bone marrow. After ten years of RA, fewer than 50% of patients can continue to work or function normally on a day to day basis.

Rituximab is the generic name for a drug currently used in the treatment of the most common form of blood cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. In its hematology indication, rituximab is marketed in Europe as MabThera and in the US, Canada and Japan as Rituxan.

About Genentech

Genentech is a leading biotechnology company that discovers, develops, manufactures and commercializes biotherapeutics for significant unmet medical needs. Fifteen of the currently approved biotechnology products stem from or are based on Genentech science. Genentech manufactures and commercializes ten biotechnology products directly in the United States. The company has headquarters in South San Francisco, California, and is traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol DNA. For more information, please visit www.rituxan.com.

About IDEC

IDEC Pharmaceuticals focuses on the commercialization and development of targeted therapies for the treatment of cancer and autoimmune diseases. IDEC's antibody products act chiefly through immune system mechanisms, exerting their effect by binding to specific, readily targeted immune cells in the patient's blood or lymphatic systems. IDEC is headquartered in San Diego, California, and is traded on the NASDAQ National Market System under the stock symbol, IDPH.

About Roche

Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Roche is one of the world's leading research-oriented healthcare groups in the fields of pharmaceuticals, diagnostics and vitamins. Roche's innovative products and services address prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases, thus enhancing people's well being and quality of life.

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