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Roche and the Medicines Patent Pool Sign Agreement to Increase Access to Medicines to Treat CMV infection in HIV-patients, a major cause of Blindness

The Medicines Patent Pool and healthcare company Roche today announce an agreement to increase access to Valcyte (valganciclovir), a key medicine to treat cytomegalovirus (CMV). CMV is a viral infection that can result in loss of vision and greater risk of death in people living with HIV. This infection affects around 1 in 10 people living with HIV in low-and middle-income countries.

The supply agreement between the Medicines Patent Pool and Roche will substantially improve access to an easy-to-take oral medicine to treat CMV, Valcyte – by making it up to 90% cheaper in 138 developing and emerging countries than it is currently available. The Medicines Patent Pool and Roche will consider adding more countries to the initial scope if there is a need and will also explore licensing and technology transfer as a second step to help local production of Valcyte and increase access to Valcyte in developing countries.

“The agreement announced today will make an oral treatment for CMV available at lower prices, to help break a cycle of lack of screening and treatment in many countries. With medicines available, HIV treatment providers can work on wider diagnosis and treatment and prevent avoidable blindness in people living with HIV,” said Greg Perry, Executive Director of the Medicines Patent Pool.

“This agreement demonstrates how working together can improve the availability of treatments for people in resource-limited countries. Roche is committed to making Valcyte available to patients suffering from HIV-related CMV infections in developing countries. Our aim is to provide access to affordable Valcyte that is produced under quality conditions and increase the number of people who access and benefit from our products,” said Daniel O’Day, COO of Roche Pharma.

Treatment of CMV is typically difficult to administer, requiring several injections to the eye. This requires hospitalisation of patients and care by highly trained staff, which are often not sufficiently available in developing countries. The oral treatment Valcyte is an alternative, but due to a number of reasons, including lack of screening and high prices, patients in developing countries have not been able to receive it.

This lower price should also help create a new market for Valcyte, stimulating greater treatment of CMV. With Roche now supplying lower-cost Valcyte, governments, treatment providers and funders can ramp up efforts to ensure screening for CMV becomes part of routine HIV care and people can access treatments to preserve their sight and extend their lives.

CMV infection is a preventable disease caused by cytomegalovirus (CMV) that attacks the retina of the eye in patients with suppressed immune systems, such as those infected with advanced-stage HIV. CMV is no longer a problem in industrialized countries, but still affects 10.1% (8.7% to 11.4%) of people living with HIV in low- and middle-income countries mainly in Asia, and to a lesser extent in Latin America and Africa¹.

Roche has also agreed to license another medicine for use in HIV-related medicines to the Medicines Patent Pool, saquinavir, in case the need arises.

About the Medicines Patent Pool

The Medicines Patent Pool is a United Nations backed, public-health driven business model that aims to lower the prices of HIV medicines and facilitate the development of better-adapted HIV medicines, such as simplified “fixed-dose combinations” and special formulations for children. It was founded in 2010 at the request of the international community through the World Health Organization-based financing mechanism UNITAID. It works by creating a pool of relevant patents for licensing to generic manufacturers and other producers, facilitating the generic competition that brings down prices and can help stimulate innovation. The Medicines Patent Pool has been endorsed by the World Health Organization, the UN High Level Meeting on AIDS, and the Group of 8 as a promising innovative approach to improve access to HIV medicines.

About Roche

Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Roche is a leader in research-focused healthcare with combined strengths in pharmaceuticals and diagnostics. Roche is the world’s largest biotech company, with truly differentiated medicines in oncology, infectious diseases, inflammation, metabolism and neuroscience. Roche is also the world leader in in vitro diagnostics and tissue-based cancer diagnostics, and a frontrunner in diabetes management. Roche’s personalised healthcare strategy aims at providing medicines and diagnostic tools that enable tangible improvements in the health, quality of life and survival of patients. In 2012 Roche had over 82,000 employees worldwide and invested over 8 billion Swiss francs in R&D. The Group posted

sales of 45.5 billion Swiss francs. Genentech, in the United States, is a wholly owned member of the Roche Group. Roche is the majority shareholder in Chugai Pharmaceutical, Japan. For more information, please visit www.roche.com.

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ⁱ Ford et. al. in: Clinical Infectious Diseases 2013; doi: 10.1093/cid/cit494