

Access to Innovative Treatments for Rheumatoid Arthritis in New Zealand, Australia and the UK¹.

Executive Summary

Biologic treatments for RA have significantly improved the quality of life for patients and can reduce the health and social service burden of the disease. The clinical benefits of biologic treatment in RA are widely accepted. Not all treatments are the same, therefore access to more than one treatment is important as patients may not, or may cease to, respond to a treatment.

Burden of RA

- The burden of RA on patients is one of the most severe among chronic progressive diseases, reducing quality of life for patients and their families through significant disablement, ongoing inflammation and pain.
- The prevalence of RA in New Zealand is estimated at 0.53%, effecting over 20, 000 adults aged over 19 years.
- Studies agree that the inflammatory nature of RA and associated gradual physical impairment lead to
 - substantially increased health care costs estimated at over NZ \$ 350 M annually. This is comparable to the estimated cost of diabetes at NZ \$ 400 M annually ².
 - patients suffering severely limited ability to work, the average annual indirect cost per patient is estimated to be over NZ \$ 10,000.
- The average health cost per patient increases with increasing functional disability – recent analysis has shown that earlier introduction of biologic treatments leads to lower costs and higher utility over ten years then starting late.

Value of Biologic Treatment

- Follow up studies on treatment with biologics have shown reductions in consultations, hospitalisations and surgery, resulting in direct health cost savings.
- Improvements in utility, significant improvements in hours worked, and improved work capacity, allow patients to return to work and lead to indirect cost savings.

Comparison of Treatment Access – NZ, Australia, UK and Western Europe

- RA sufferers in New Zealand have extremely poor access to biologic treatments with the lowest uptake of biological treatments for RA among the compared countries.
- The number of RA patients in New Zealand receiving biologic treatment is less than one quarter that of Australia, the UK and other EU countries.
- Not all treatments are the same, patients who don't respond to one treatment may respond to another.
- Despite the fact that several countries have found biologic treatments to be cost effective, only one treatment is funded for treatment of RA in New Zealand.
- In comparison, six biologic treatments are funded in Australia. The lack of choice in New Zealand to switch to another product when deemed necessary may lead to sub optimal treatment.

Conclusion

- New Zealand provides the most restricted access amongst the compared countries to biologic treatments for patients with RA. This is likely to lead to poorer patient outcomes and increased health costs.

¹ *Access to Innovative Treatments for Rheumatoid Arthritis in New Zealand, Australia and the UK*. May 2010. From European Health Economics and i3 Innovus.

² NZMJ, June 2006, Vol 119, No 1235.