Biosimilar medicine switches

Information for patients at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

Introduction

This leaflet offers information about our plans to switch your treatment to a biosimilar brand of the same drug.

If you have any questions or concerns after reading this leaflet, please speak to your doctor or nurse.

Switch from _____ (Current brand)

To _____ (New brand)

What is a biological medicine?

A biological medicine, or biologic, is a medicine made from living cells or organisms. They are complex medicines that include hormone treatments, insulin, vaccines, monoclonal antibodies and gene therapies.

Biological medicines have been used in hospitals for many years in the treatment of diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis and diabetes (insulin is a biologic medicine).

What is a biosimilar?

A biosimilar medicine (known as a 'biosimilar') is a newer version of an existing biological medicine. It has been shown to work in the same way and to be as safe and effective as the original medicine.

Unlike generic medicines, biosimilars are not exact copies of the original medicine. Generic medicines, such as supermarket own-brand ibuprofen, are exact copies of medicines such as Nurofen. However, biological medicines are very complex, so it is not possible to make an exact copy.

Biosimilars go through strict testing to make sure they are safe, effective and meet the required quality standards. They are regulated by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), in the same way as other biological medicines.

What are the advantages of biosimilar medicines?

There is now a lot of experience within the NHS of using biosimilars and prescribing biosimilars has become normal practice.

Many original biological medicines are expensive and the number of conditions they treat is increasing.

Biosimilar medicines are highly similar to the original medicines and have the same quality, safety and effectiveness as well as being less expensive. Therefore, the savings made by using biosimilars allow the NHS to treat more patients and invest in new medicines to further improve patient care.

Are biosimilar medicines safe?

Yes. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines a biosimilar as a medicine that is similar in terms of quality, safety and effectiveness to the original licensed medicine.

All medicines, including biosimilars, must pass rigorous tests before they can be used.

We do not expect patients to experience problems as a result of switching to a biosimilar or when changing from one biosimilar to another. We have already switched many patients who were receiving other biologic medicines to biosimilar versions with no significant issues or concerns.

What differences might there be?

We expect patients switching to a biosimilar to have the same response as if they had stayed on the original biologic or a different biosimilar brand. Unfortunately, all medications may stop being effective at some point in time, but this is no more likely to happen with a biosimilar than with the original medicine.

However, there are likely to be some small differences if you use a self-injection device including:

- **Injection device**: Different products may use different injection devices. If you have changed brands, your new device may look or work differently from the one you are used to. You will receive full training and support until you are confident using the new device
- **Homecare delivery service**: If you change to a different product, it may be delivered by a different homecare delivery service

What does this mean for me?

You will receive a biosimilar for your next infusion/injection. For certain infusions, the first few doses might have an increased infusion time. No additional monitoring is needed.

In the future, you may also change from one biosimilar to another if there is a contract change.

What happens if I change to a biosimilar, but I have side effects?

We would not be offering this medicine unless we were completely confident that it was just as safe and effective as your current medication. When switching to a biosimilar, it is not expected that there will be any issues and all versions of medication can cause similar side effects. In the unlikely event you experience any problems with your treatment, report it promptly to your treating clinician, nurse or pharmacist.

All suspected side effects should be reported via the Yellow Card Scheme online: **https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/**

Further advice

If you have further questions about your treatment or biosimilars, then please speak to a member of your clinical team or pharmacy team. Welcome to UHB

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