Ranibizumab biosimilar (Ongavia®)

Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

This leaflet is designed to provide patients with more information about biosimilar medicines, answering some frequently asked questions you may have.

Whether you are due to start treatment with ranibizumab for the first time or have agreed with your clinician that your treatment will change from Lucentis® to biosimilar ranibizumab (Ongavia®), please be reassured that you can expect the same results.

What is ranibizumab?

Ranibizumab is a medicine that needs to be injected into the eye. It is used to treat eye conditions which affect the retina, such as wet age-related macular degeneration (wet AMD), diabetic macular oedema and retinal vein occlusion. It belongs to a group of medicines called anti-Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor (anti-VEGF) agents.

What is ranibizumab used for?

If you are receiving treatment with ranibizumab (Lucentis®) or your ophthalmic healthcare professional is recommending treatment with ranibizumab, it means your eye contains more than normal amounts of a substance called Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor (VEGF). Too much VEGF causes leaky, abnormal blood vessels.

The excess fluid that comes from these blood vessels can build up in your eye and affect your vision by causing swelling and eventually scarring in your retina.

Ranibizumab blocks the action of VEGF. By blocking VEGF, ranibizumab prevents abnormal blood vessels from growing and stops damaged blood vessels from leaking fluid.

How is ranibizumab administered?

Ranibizumab is given as a course of injections into the eye.

Over time, the injections can stop the growth of abnormal blood vessels and leakage from these vessels. The aim is to reduce swelling, prevent further loss of vision and sometimes improve vision.

Your ophthalmic healthcare professional will advise on the number and frequency of injections you need.

How dose ranibizumab compare to other anti-VEGF agents prescribed for your condition?

Other anti-VEGF agents include aflibercept (Eyle®), brolucizumab (Beovu®), bevacizumab (Avastin®) and faricimab (Vabysmo®). Your ophthalmic healthcare professional will discuss the treatment options with you and support you to make a decision about your treatment.

How is ranibizumab made?

Ranibizumab is a biological medicine. Biological medicines are medicines made or derived from living cells.

What versions of ranibizumab are available in the UK?

Until recently, only one pharmaceutical company made ranibizumab (Lucentis). Now another company makes a biosimilar ranibizumab. In the future, other biosimilar versions of ranibizumab will become available.

Preparing you for the switch to biosimilar ranibizumab

What is biosimilar ranibizumab?

Biosimilar ranibizumab is a highly similar copy of the original ranibizumab medicine. 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 product.

Are biosimilar medicines safe?

The body in the UK who regular medicines is the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). All medicines have to pass rigorous tests for quality, biological activity, safety and effectiveness. Biosimilar medicines pass the same tests as the original medicine.

What are the benefits of biosimilars?

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.

What does treatment with biosimilar ranibizumab mean for you?

Whether you are due to start treatment with ranibizumab for the first time or have agreed with your clinician that your treatment will change from Lucentis® to biosimilar ranibizumab (Ongavia®), you can expect the same results.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) produces guidance for healthcare If NICE recommends the original biological medicine in their guidance, the same recommendation applies to the biosimilar medicines.

What are the side effects?

All versions of ranibizumab can cause similar side effects. If you experience any problems with your treatment, report it promptly to your treating ophthalmology clinician or nurse.

Some common side effects that could occur include:

- Increased redness in the white part of the eye
- Eye pain that can feel like throbbing, itching or soreness
- Eye floaters, or small sting-like objects or dots that appear to float around your line of vision
- Increased eye pressure that can make it difficult to open or close your eyes. It can also feel like a throbbing sensation behind your eye.

Further advice

If you have further questions about ranibizumab or biosimilars, please speak to a member of your ophthalmology.

You can also visit Specialist Pharmacy Service website at https://www.sps.nhs.uk/ for further information as well as the Macular Society website at www.macularsociety.org/support/

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

The team are available to help with any concerns/complaints you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

The contact details are:

Telephone: 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059
Email: dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net