

## A niche market beckons for Viela's Uplizna



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Astrazeneca's spinout Viela Bio gained its first approval yesterday: that of inebilizumab, trademarked Uplizna, for the rare autoimmune condition neuromyelitis optica spectrum disorder. However, extensive off-label use of rituximab could be a barrier to adoption. Both rituximab and Uplizna are B-cell-depleting therapies, and payers could require patients to take rituximab, including biosimilars, before more expensive treatments like Uplizna are considered. If that is the case, and a patient were to fail on a relatively cheap B-cell depleter, physicians might choose to move to a different mechanism of action – such as Alexion's Soliris, an anti-C5 MAb approved last year – instead of using a second, more expensive B-cell-depleting agent. Other projects are vying for the US market, which comprises 4,000-8,000 patients; Roche's satralizumab has been filed in the indication, and ultomiris, a follow on to Soliris, is in phase III.

Neuromyelitis optica landscape						
Project	Company	Target	Setting	Reduction in attack risk (study)	Treatment/placebo adverse event rate	2026 NMO sales
Soliris	Alexion	C5	Mainly add-on	94% in AQP4+ ( <a href="#">Prevent</a> )	92%/91%	\$488m
Rituxan	Roche (also biosimilars)	CD20	Mono or combo	70-89% (various)	90%/90%	-
Uplizna	Viela Bio	CD19	Mono	73%, 77% in AQP4+ ( <a href="#">N-Momentum</a> )	72%/73%	\$586m
Satralizumab	Roche/ Chugai	IL-6	Add-on	62% ( <a href="#">SakuraSky</a> )	90%/95%	\$431m
			Mono	74% in AQP4+ ( <a href="#">SakuraStar</a> )	92%/75%	
Ultomiris	Alexion	C5	Add-on	? AQP4+ ( <a href="#">NCT04201262</a> )	?	\$264m

AQP4 = aquaporin 4 antibody, a key biomarker for disease found in around 80% of NM  
 Source: Company releases, Stifel & EvaluatePharma.