Evaluate Vantage

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Ilaris sucumbs to its fate with FDA gout rejection

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The only surprising thing about Novartis' complete response letter for gouty arthritis treatment Ilaris is that it came a few days later than many had expected.

As widely predicted following an 11-1 vote against approval at an FDA advisory committee back in June, the US health authority declined yesterday to approve the drug, throwing a big spanner into the works for Novartis' strategy to expand the drug into larger indications. The big question now is what Novartis will do with Ilaris (*Ilaris misses chance in gout, June 22, 2011*).

Although the Swiss group has said that it will carry on with development of Ilaris in inflammatory diseases where interleukin-1 beta plays a key role, with the prospect of big expensive trials ahead of it, for what might ultimately be a small patient population, gout is unlikely to be one of those diseases.

Widely expected

This setback is the second for the drug, which was abandoned in rheumatoid arthritis in phase II. It now leaves Ilaris, which has already been approved in the niche indication of cryopyrin-associated periodic syndrome, looking at juvenile idiopathic arthritis and osteoarthritis.

It now seems a long time since the likes of Credit Suisse were forecasting sales in gout of $400m, although in reality it was only back in April. But with the bad news already priced into the shares following the negative response from the advisory committee shares in Novartis actually rose yesterday in better markets.

As for its next move, Novartis might decide the fate of Ilaris following the outcome of European ruling in gout due by the end of the year, although the drug is almost certain to run up against similar safety concerns again.

Safety first

What derailed Ilaris' US approval was that less than 10% of trial patients had received the drug more than three times. Given that the drug is filed for gout flares, use over a lifetime would have easily exceeded this. Of particular worry to the regulator were the greater rates of infection and raised uric acid levels in the blood.

The FDA's rejection highlights the fact that companies can no longer get away with limited safety data, unless the indication they are going after has few treatment options available.

While this is not a major blow to Novartis, it has failed to validate the group's start small and expand philosophy. But one group it might make a difference to is the companies looking at new and novel gout treatments in a very thin field (*Therapeutic focus - Gout pipeline looks thin but holds promise, May 26, 2011*).

Gout treatments							
						Annual Sales WW - ($)	
Status	**Product**	**Generic Name**	**Company**	**Pharmacological Class**	**Launch WW**	**2010**	**2016**
Filed	Ilaris		Bristol-Myers Squibb/Novartis/ Pharmaceuticals	Anti-IL-1-beta	31/03/2012	26	605
	Arcalyst	rilonacept	Regeneron Pharmaceuticals	IL-1 antagonist	30/09/2012	25	97
Phase III	FYX-051	topiroxostat	Fuji Yakuhin/Suzuken Group	Anti-gout preparation	-	-	-
	BCX-4208	-	BioCryst Pharmaceuticals	Purine nucleoside phosphorylase (PNP) inhibitor	31/12/2015	-	30
Phase II	RDEA594	lesinurad	Ardea Biosciences	URAT1 inhibitor	31/12/2014	-	238
	RDEA806	-	Ardea Biosciences/Valeant Pharmaceuticals International	Non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NNRTI)	31/12/2013	-	-
	NU1618	tranilast	Kissei Pharmaceutical/Nuon Therapeutics	Xanthine oxidase inhibitor	-	-	-
	MBX-102/JNJ 39659100	arhalofenate	Johnson & Johnson/Metabolex	Selective PPAR gamma modulator (SPPARM)	-	-	-
	S-Tofisopam	dextofisopam	Pharmos	Benzodiazepine	-	-	-
Phase I	Pegadricase	pegadricase	Polaris Group/3SBio	Urate oxidase	-	-	-
	LC350189	-	LG Life Sciences	Anti-gout preparation	-	-	-
	XOMA 052	gevokizumab	XOMA/Les Laboratoires Servier	Anti-IL-1-beta MAb	-	-	-