European Medicines Agency
Pre-authorisation Evaluation of Medicines for Human Use

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Committee for Orphan Medicinal Products

Public summary of positive opinion for orphan designation of palifosfamide for the treatment of soft tissue sarcoma

On 3 December 2008, orphan designation (EU/3/08/584) was granted by the European Commission to ZIOPHARM Oncology Limited, United Kingdom, for palifosfamide for the treatment of soft tissue sarcoma.

What is soft tissue sarcoma?
Soft tissue sarcoma is a type of cancer that affects the supportive tissues of the body. It can occur in muscles, blood vessels, fat tissue or in other tissues that support, surround and protect the organs. The cause of soft tissue sarcoma is largely unknown. Soft tissue sarcoma is a serious condition that can cause disability and is life threatening.

What is the estimated number of patients affected by soft tissue sarcoma?
At the time of designation, soft tissue sarcoma affected less than 2.5 in 10,000 people in the European Union (EU)[*]. This is below the threshold for orphan designation which is 5 in 10,000, and is equivalent to a total of fewer than 125,000 people. This is based on the information provided by the sponsor and knowledge of the Committee for Orphan Medicinal Products (COMP).

What treatments are available?
The main treatment for early-stage soft tissue sarcoma is surgery. For large sarcomas, surgery is usually followed by radiotherapy (treatment with radiation) and chemotherapy (medicines to treat cancer) to kill any cancerous cells that are left behind. At the time of designation, several medicines were authorised for the treatment of soft tissue sarcoma in the EU.
The sponsor has provided sufficient information to show that palifosfamide might be of significant benefit for patients with soft tissue sarcoma because it might improve treatment of patients with this condition. This assumption will need to be confirmed at the time of marketing authorisation, in order to maintain the orphan status.

How is this medicine product expected to work?
Palifosfamide is the 'active metabolite' of ifosfamide, an anticancer medicine used to treat soft tissue sarcoma. It is called 'a metabolite' because it is formed when ifosfamide is broken down in the body and 'active' because it is the substance that does the work to treat the disease.
Palifosfamide is expected to work in the same way as ifosfamide by acting as an 'alkylating agent'. Alkylating agents kill cancer cells by attaching to the cells' DNA while they are dividing. This stops cell division and slows down the growth of the tumour.

[*] Disclaimer: For the purpose of the designation, the number of patients affected by the condition is estimated and assessed based on data from the European Union (EU 27), Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. This represents a population of 502,282,000 (Eurostat 2008).

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Palifosfamide might also have fewer side effects than ifosfamide because when ifosfamide is broken down it forms other toxic substances in addition to palifosfamide. When palifosfamide is used these other toxic substances will not be produced.

What is the stage of development of this medicine?
The effects of palifosfamide have been evaluated in experimental models.
At the time of submission of the application for orphan designation, clinical trials in patients with soft tissue sarcoma were ongoing.
At the time of submission, palifosfamide was not authorised anywhere in the EU for soft tissue sarcoma. Orphan drug designation of the medicine was granted in the United States of America in May 2008 for the treatment of soft tissue sarcoma.

In accordance with Regulation (EC) No 141/2000 of 16 December 1999, the COMP adopted a positive opinion on 8 October 2008 recommending the granting of this designation.

Opinions on orphan medicinal product designations are based on the following three criteria:
- the seriousness of the condition;
- the existence of alternative methods of diagnosis, prevention or treatment;
- either the rarity of the condition (affecting not more than 5 in 10,000 people in the Community) or insufficient returns on investment.

Designated orphan medicinal products are products that are still under investigation and are considered for orphan designation on the basis of potential activity. An orphan designation is not a marketing authorisation. As a consequence, demonstration of quality, safety and efficacy is necessary before a product can be granted marketing authorisation.

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Translations of the active ingredient and indication in all official EU languages, Norwegian and Icelandic

Language	Active Ingredient	Indication
English	Palifosfamide	Treatment of soft tissue sarcoma
Bulgarian	Палифосфамид	Лечение на сарком на меките тъкани
Czech	Palifosfamid	Léčba sarkomu měkkých tkání
Danish	Palifosfamid	Behandling af bløddelssarkom
Dutch	Palifosfamide	Behandeling weke delen sarcoom
Estonian	Palifosfamiid	Pehmete kudede sarkoomi ravi
Finnish	Palifosfamidi	Pehmytkudossarkooman hoito
French	Palifosfamide	Traitement des sarcomes des tissus mous
German	Paliphosphamid	Behandlung des Weichteilsarkoms
Greek	Παλιφωσφαμίδη	Θεραπεία του σαρκώματος των μαλακών ιστών
Hungarian	Palifoszfamid	Lágy szöveti sarcoma kezelése
Italian	Palifosfamide	Trattamento dei sarcomi dei tessuti molli
Latvian	Palifosfamīds	Mīksto audu sarkomas ārstēšana
Lithuanian	Palifosfamidas	Minkštųjų audinių sarkomos gydymas
Maltese	Palifosfamide	Kura tas-sarkoma tat-tessuti rotob
Polish	Palifosfamid	Leczenie mięsaków tkanek miękkich
Portuguese	Palifosfamida	Tratamento do sarcoma dos tecidos moles
Romanian	Palifosfamidă	Tratamentul sarcomului țesuturilor moi
Slovak	Palifosfamid	Liečba sarkómu mäkkých tkanív
Slovenian	Palifosfamid	Zdravljenje sarkoma mehkih tkiv
Spanish	Palifosfamida	Tratamiento del sarcoma de tejidos blandos
Swedish	Palifosfamid	Behandling av mjukdelssarkom
Norwegian	Palifosfamid	Behandling av bløtvevssarkom
Icelandic	Palífosfamíð	Meðferð við mjúkvefjasarkmeini