30 September 2015
EMA/COMP/508881/2015
Committee for Orphan Medicinal Products

Public summary of opinion on orphan designation

Verucerfont for the treatment of congenital adrenal hyperplasia

On 10 August 2015, orphan designation (EU/3/15/1537) was granted by the European Commission to Neurocrine Therapeutics Ltd, Ireland, for verucerfont for the treatment of congenital adrenal hyperplasia.

What is congenital adrenal hyperplasia?

Congenital adrenal hyperplasia is a group of inherited conditions where patients are unable to produce normal amounts of the steroid hormones cortisol and aldosterone, which play an important role in responding to stress and regulating salt and water in the body. These hormones are produced by the adrenal glands, two small glands that are located above the kidneys. In patients with the condition, the substances normally used to produce these hormones instead become converted to male sex hormones. Congenital adrenal hyperplasia can be caused by many different changes (mutations) in the genes controlling the production of cortisol and aldosterone.

Congenital adrenal hyperplasia is long-term debilitating and life threatening due to failure of the response to stress (adrenal insufficiency), altered amounts of salt and water in the body, low blood pressure, and early puberty in boys or development of masculine characteristics in girls, which can lead to growth stopping early and short stature.

What is the estimated number of patients affected by the condition?

At the time of designation, congenital adrenal hyperplasia affected approximately 0.6 in 10,000 people in the European Union (EU). This was equivalent to a total of around 31,000 people*, and is below the ceiling for orphan designation, which is 5 people in 10,000. This is based on the information provided by the sponsor and the knowledge of the Committee for Orphan Medicinal Products (COMP).

*Disclaimer: For the purpose of the designation, the number of patients affected by the condition is estimated and assessed on the basis of data from the European Union (EU 28), Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. This represents a population of 512,900,000 (Eurostat 2015).

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What treatments are available?

At time of designation, several products to treat congenital adrenal hyperplasia were authorised in the EU. In particular, various steroid hormones were used to replace those which are insufficiently produced by the adrenal gland and to control the production of excess male sex hormones.

The sponsor has provided sufficient information to show that verucerfont might be of significant benefit for patients with congenital adrenal hyperplasia because early results in patients showed reduced levels of male sex hormones and other substances associated with the 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 expected to work?

The production of steroid hormones by the adrenal glands is normally stimulated by another hormone called adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH). In patients with congenital adrenal hyperplasia, the low levels of cortisol and aldosterone cause the body to make more ACTH, in an attempt to increase their production. However, because the adrenal glands are incapable of making these hormones, ACTH only stimulates the production of male sex hormones. Verucerfont blocks the chemical switch that leads to the release of ACTH, thus lowering the amount of ACTH released. This action is expected to reduce the production of male sex hormones, and thereby relieve the symptoms of the condition and make it more responsive to other treatments.

What is the stage of development of this medicine?

The effects of verucerfont have been evaluated in experimental models.

At the time of submission of the application for orphan designation, clinical trials with verucerfont in patients with congenital adrenal hyperplasia were ongoing.

At the time of submission, verucerfont was not authorised anywhere in the EU for congenital adrenal hyperplasia. Orphan designation of verucerfont had been granted in the United States for this condition.

In accordance with Regulation (EC) No 141/2000 of 16 December 1999, the COMP adopted a positive opinion on 16 July 2015 recommending the granting of this designation.

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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 EU) 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 a marketing authorisation.

For more information

Sponsor's contact details:

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For contact details of patients' organisations whose activities are targeted at rare diseases see:

- Orphanet, a database containing information on rare diseases, which includes a directory of patients' organisations registered in Europe;
- European Organisation for Rare Diseases (EURORDIS), a non-governmental alliance of patient organisations and individuals active in the field of rare diseases.

Translations of the active ingredient and indication in all official EU languages[1], Norwegian and Icelandic

Language	Active ingredient	Indication
English	Verucerfont	Treatment of congenital adrenal hyperplasia
Bulgarian	Веруцерфонт	Лечение на вродена надбъбречна хиперплазия
Croatian	Verucerfont	Liječenje kongenitalne adrenalne hiperplazije
Czech	Verucerfont	Léčba vrozené hyperplasie nadledvin
Danish	Verucerfont	Behandling af medfødt binyrebarkhyperplasi
Dutch	Verucerfont	Behandeling van congenitale bijnierhyperplasia
Estonian	Verucerfont	Kaasasündinud neerupealise hüperplaasia ravi
Finnish	Veruserfontti	Lisämunuaisen synnynnäisen liikakasvun hoito
French	Verucerfont	Traitmement de l'hyperplasie surrénale congénitale
German	Verucerfont	Behandlung der Kongenitalen Adrenalen Hyperplasie
Greek	Βερουσερφόντη	Θεραπεία της συγγενούς επινεφριδιακής υπερπλασίας
Hungarian	Verucerfont	Congenitalis adrenalis hyperplasia kezelése
Italian	Verucerfont	Trattamento dell'iperplasia surrenale congenita
Latvian	Verucerfonts	Iedzimtas virsnieru hiperplāzijas ārstēšana
Lithuanian	Verucerfontas	Įgimtos antinksčių hiperplazijos gydymas
Maltese	Verucerfont	Kura ta' l-iperplasija adrenali konġenitali
Polish	Verucerfont	Leczenie wrodzonego przerostu nadnerczy
Portuguese	Verucerfonte	Tratamento da hiperplasia adrenal congenita
Romanian	Verucerfont	Tratamentul hiperplaziei congenitale corticosuprarenale
Slovak	Verucerfont	Liečba kongenitálnej nadobličkovej hyperplázie
Slovenian	Verucerfont	Kongenitalna adrenalna hiperplazija
Spanish	Verucerfont	Tratamiento de la hiperplasia suprarrenal congénita
Swedish	Verucerfont	Behandling av adrenogenitalt syndrom
Norwegian	Verucerfont	Behandling av kongenitt binyrebarkhyperplasi
Icelandic	Verúcerfont	Meðfædd nýrnahettu hyperplasía

[1] At the time of designation