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Committee for Orphan Medicinal Products

Recommendation for maintenance of orphan designation at the time of marketing authorisation

Holoclar (*ex vivo* expanded autologous human corneal epithelium containing stem cells) for the treatment of corneal lesions, with associated corneal (limbal) stem-cell deficiency, due to ocular burns

During its meeting of 7 to 9 January 2015, the Committee for Orphan Medicinal Products (COMP) reviewed the designation EU/3/08/579 for Holoclar (*ex vivo* expanded autologous human corneal epithelium containing stem cells) as an orphan medicinal product for the treatment of corneal lesions, with associated corneal (limbal) stem-cell deficiency, due to ocular burns. The COMP assessed whether, at the time of marketing authorisation, the medicinal product still met the criteria for orphan designation. The Committee looked at the seriousness and prevalence of the condition, and the existence of other methods of treatment. As other methods of treatment exist in the European Union (EU), the COMP also considered whether the medicine is of significant benefit to patients with this condition. The COMP recommended that the orphan designation of the medicine be maintained[1].

Life-threatening or long-term debilitating nature of the condition

The Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) recommended the following indication for Holoclar:

'Treatment of adult patients with moderate to severe limbal stem cell deficiency (defined by the presence of superficial corneal neovascularisation in at least two corneal quadrants, with central corneal involvement, and severely impaired visual acuity), unilateral or bilateral, due to physical or chemical ocular burns. A minimum of 1–2 mm^2 of undamaged limbus is required for biopsy'.

This falls within the scope of the product's designated orphan indication, which is: 'treatment of corneal lesions, with associated corneal (limbal) stem cell deficiency, due to ocular burns'.

[1] The maintenance of the orphan designation at time of marketing authorisation would, except in specific situations, give an orphan medicinal product 10 years of market exclusivity in the EU. This means that in the 10 years after its authorisation similar products with a comparable therapeutic indication cannot be placed on the market.

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The COMP concluded that there had been no change in the seriousness of the condition since the orphan designation in 2008. The condition remains debilitating in the long term particularly because it can cause loss of vision.

Prevalence of the condition

The sponsor provided updated information on the prevalence of the orphan condition based on an extrapolation of data on severe corneal injuries from a survey in the United Kingdom.

On the basis of the information provided by the sponsor and the knowledge of the COMP, the COMP concluded that the prevalence of the orphan condition remains below the ceiling for orphan designation, which is 5 people in 10,000. At the time of the review of the orphan designation, the prevalence was estimated to be less than 0.3 people in 10,000. This is equivalent to a total of fewer than 15,000 people in the EU.

Existence of other methods of treatment

At the time of the review of the orphan designation, surgical treatments such as corneal transplantations were available to treat corneal lesions in patients with limbal stem-cell deficiency caused by burns.

Significant benefit of Holoclar

As Holoclar is an autologous product, manufactured from the patient's own limbal cells, treatment does not carry the same risk of rejection as with some treatments using cells from donors and therefore does not require the use of immunosuppressive medicines.

In addition, Holoclar can be used in patients with only a small amount of undamaged limbal tissue as only a small amount is needed to make the product. In some patients, it can also be used in addition to existing surgical treatments to improve outcomes.

Therefore, although other methods for the treatment of this condition are used in the EU, the COMP concluded that Holoclar is of significant benefit to patients affected by the condition.

Conclusions

Based on the data submitted and the scientific discussion within the COMP, the COMP considered that Holoclar still meets the criteria for designation as an orphan medicinal product and that it should remain in the Community Register of Orphan Medicinal Products.

Further information on the current regulatory status of Holoclar can be found in the European public assessment report (EPAR) on the Agency's website: ema.europa.eu/Find medicine/Human medicines/European public assessment reports.