

Draft advice to the European Medicines Agency from the clinical trial advisory group on legal aspects

Draft Advice to EMA

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5 The Advisory Group on Legal Aspects (the Group) has discussed about the legal aspects that the
6 European Medicines Agency (the Agency) should take into consideration when designing a policy to
7 proactively publish clinical-trial data. The adoption of this policy was announced at the workshop on
8 access to clinical-trial data and transparency held on 22 November 2012.

9 The Group has discussed, in particular, the following three aspects:

- 10 a) whether or not clinical-trial data contain commercially confidential information whose
11 publication could undermine the legitimate commercial interests of the author;
- 12 b) copyright aspects involved in the publication of data; and
- 13 c) legal remedies in case of disagreement with the decision to publish.

14 The list of participants is included in the Annex.

15 The Group participants have discussed about these aspects in two virtual meetings held on 30 January
16 and 7 March 2013. Furthermore, they have been able to submit written comments. The present
17 document contains the arguments raised both in the meetings and in the written submissions. An
18 overview of the submissions is included in an attached document.

19 This document is now subject to consultation of the participants of the Advisory Group on Legal
20 Aspects. Comments should be submitted to the Agency via email to CTdataGroup5@ema.europa.eu ,
21 **no later than Thursday 25 April 2013, E.O.B.**

22 These comments must be circumscribed to the arguments presented herewith. Arguments not
23 included in this document will only be accepted as long as they were included in the written
24 submissions albeit not reflected in this document.

25 **1. Commercially Confidential Information**

26 The Group has not managed to find an agreement about commercially confidential information. The
27 views have been quite polarised between those who consider that clinical-trial data contain, or are,
28 commercially confidential information and hence publication cannot take place without first consulting
29 the MAH; and those who argue in favour of full transparency and oppose the views concerning of
30 presence of commercially confidential information in clinical-trial data.

31 Enhanced transparency of clinical-trial data is widely recognised as a valid means to foster innovation,
32 research and development of new medicines. However, many participants call for a balance between
33 transparency and protection of confidentiality, intellectual property and personal data.

34 Whereas some have defended that clinical-trial data contain no commercially confidential information
35 that should prevent its proactive publication, others have opposed this view and have claimed that an
36 individual assessment and a consultation with the marketing authorisation holder (hereinafter, the

This document does not reflect the position of the European Medicines Agency on the proactive publication of clinical-trial data and will inform the European Medicines Agency in drafting its policy.
This document contains the views and opinions expressed and discussed by the participants of the Clinical Trial Advisory Group on Legal aspects (CTAG5)

37 MAH) should be conducted to allow him to express his views before publication: this would enable to
38 strike a balance between transparency and the rights of industry and patients to have their confidential
39 information protected.

40 An argument subject to extensive discussion has been *conditionality*: publication of clinical-trial data
41 should be favoured on condition of *bona fide* independent research and as a means of expanding
42 scientific knowledge. Although this has been an argument endorsed by many participants, again no
43 total agreement has been reached.

44 In conclusion, the Group has not been able to find a common agreement about commercially
45 confidential information and its effects on proactive publication of clinical-trial data. The reasons for
46 the divergent views of the Group are presented below.

47 **Arguments in support of proactive publication**

48 Other participants consider that clinical-trial data should be made transparent and support proactive
49 publication. Their arguments are presented below:

50 **a. Consistency with Regulation 1049/2001.** A policy to proactively publish clinical-trial data
51 based on conditionality must not be understood as an alternative to public access under Regulation
52 1049/2001. It must be noted that conditionality could easily be circumvented by making requests
53 under Regulation 1049/2001.

54 A proactive publication policy should be based on a consistent assessment of Regulation 1049/2001,
55 i.e. documents should be published if, following a request for access to documents, they were
56 disclosed. Moreover, proactive publication could be caught by Regulation 1049/2001 as it provides for
57 the setting up of registers.

58 Even if it was accepted that clinical-trial data should not be published, sponsors should provide a
59 detailed, well-substantiated explanation at the time of submission of why their publication would
60 prejudice their commercial interests. This should never apply to an entire document, and the
61 protection should not be timeless.

62 **b. Standardised clinical tests.** Study reports containing clinical-trial data are based on
63 standardised clinical tests. It would thus be unusual that any given data would reveal any significant
64 information, as regards their format, which would not already be known by industry. There is a public
65 interest in ensuring that MAA are refused not on formal grounds but rather on the basis of the
66 substantive content of a dossier. Hence, it is unlikely that the structure of any particular dossier would
67 be commercially sensitive since any information to be gleaned from it in terms of how it is presented
68 could and should in any case be validly provided to the pharmaceutical industry by the Agency.

69 There is, in any case, a public interest in ensuring that medicines to treat conditions in humans are not
70 rejected on the basis of formal structural deficiencies. As such, if it was the case that additional
71 guidance to the industry could be provided through giving public access to clinical-trial data, this would
72 in fact imply that there is an overriding public interest in making them public: this would override any
73 putative commercial interest in denying competitors access to them.

74 **c. Commercial interest of clinical-trial data.** It is difficult to imagine how clinical-trial data on
75 which a MAA is based could be of strategic and operational use to a competing pharmaceutical
76 company after the granting of the marketing authorisation. Competing pharmaceutical companies will,
77 through the marketing authorisation, be able to estimate when a competing product might arrive on
78 the market and what characteristics that product will have.

79 But if still argued that clinical-trial data remained of commercial interest, it would have to be shown,
80 on a case-by-case basis that they could reveal, for a specific product, details of what other products
81 would be developed.

82 Furthermore, no evidence has been put forward of a specific case where information contained in
83 clinical-trial data reveals details of what other molecules might be developed. Indeed, it would seem

84 very unusual that such data, designed to test the safety and effectiveness of a specific molecule, would
85 reveal any information in relation to the development of other molecules.

86 **d. Use of clinical-trial data in other jurisdictions.** It has been widely argued that generic
87 manufacturers will use clinical-trial data to obtain marketing authorisations in jurisdictions without
88 patent protection. It has not, however, been shown that the regulatory authorities in any such
89 jurisdiction even require detailed clinical-trial data for their granting. If they demanded such data, this
90 would surely imply that generic manufacturers would not be able to obtain a marketing authorisation in
91 those jurisdictions today.

92 **e. Legitimate expectations.** Regulation 1049/2001 subjects to disclosure all documents held by
93 the Agency, unless one of the exceptions of Article 4 becomes applicable. It cannot therefore be
94 argued that an applicant is not aware that, at the time of submission of a MAA, the dossier can be
95 accessed upon a request and thus available in the public domain.

96 **f. Declaration of Helsinki 2008.** The World Medical Association's "Declaration of Helsinki on
97 Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects" makes an ethical requirement the
98 publication of results of clinical-trial data. Point 30 reads as follows:

99 *Authors, editors and publishers all have ethical obligations with regard to the publication of*
100 *the results of research. Authors have a duty to make publicly available the results of their*
101 *research on human subjects and are accountable for the completeness and accuracy of their*
102 *reports. They should adhere to accepted guidelines for ethical reporting. Negative and*
103 *inconclusive as well as positive results should be published or otherwise made publicly*
104 *available. Sources of funding, institutional affiliations and conflicts of interest should be*
105 *declared in the publication. Reports of research not in accordance with the principles of this*
106 *Declaration should not be accepted for publication.*

107 The participation of patients in clinical trials is conducted on the understanding that their participation
108 will benefit the advancement of science.

109 **g. Competitiveness.** Competitiveness in the pharmaceutical industry will benefit from full
110 transparency, as independent analysis of clinical-trial data will become available to all parties. It will
111 also be beneficial to inform their decisions.

112 **h. Public interest.** Scientific bias, selective publication and withholding of important safety data
113 should become more difficult if clinical-trial data were actively disclosed, this way reinforcing public
114 health and public trust in medicines. As such, clinical-trial data must be regarded as a public good
115 intended for the public interest; and human rights must be interpreted in the light of data
116 transparency, which is to be boosted by meta-analysis and confirmation of claims about safety and
117 efficacy of medicines.

118 Pharmaceutical companies can seek public access to the clinical-trial data of a competitor for various
119 reasons: to identify possible errors in that data and in their analysis by the Agency; to identify possible
120 inconsistencies in the manner in which its competitor markets its product, or in the manner in which
121 that product is analysed in scientific journals; or even to publicise any such inconsistencies. However,
122 it is also reasonably foreseeable that independent researchers will benefit from publication of clinical-
123 trial data in their pursuit to, among other things, identify potential inconsistencies and publicise them.
124 In this case, it cannot be maintained that a pharmaceutical company has a legitimate commercial
125 interest in ensuring that deficiencies in its clinical-trial data remain undiscovered, or that claims made
126 in relation to its product cannot be cross-checked with the clinical-trial data.

127 There is indeed a public interest in ensuring that the parties that have both an interest in identifying
128 deficiencies from clinical-trial data, and the technical capacity to identify such deficiencies, benefit from
129 their publication. These are, potentially, independent researchers but also competing pharmaceutical
130 companies: it hence becomes a relevant argument in determining whether there is an overriding public
131 interest in disclosure.

132 **i. Reliability and accountability.** Full transparency has shown to be necessary to ensure
133 clinical-trial data reliability and public accountability of the regulatory system itself.

134 **j. *Patent protection and data exclusivity.*** These are already existing incentives which allow
135 pharmaceutical companies to recoup their investments in development of medicines and their placing
136 in the market.

137 **k. *Terms of consent of clinical-trial subjects.*** Contractual obligations entered into by sponsors
138 cannot prevent disclosure as regulatory requirements can override specific clauses in informed consent
139 forms. It is hardly acceptable the argument that sponsors' and researchers' commitments to patients
140 can justify a restriction on use and disclosure of data, and the same can be said about invoking respect
141 of patients and their privacy interests as a ground to limit disclosure.

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144 **Arguments objecting to proactive publication**

145 The reasons advanced by participants arguing that clinical-trial data contain or amount to commercially
146 confidential information and objecting, to a lesser or greater extent, to proactive publication are the
147 following:

148 **a. *Existence of commercially confidential information.*** Clinical-trial data are commercially
149 confidential and not only in exceptional circumstances, as they contain information such as know-how,
150 intellectual property information regarding the manufacturing, technological approaches and
151 development of innovative medicines; the innovator's clinical-trial design and product development
152 strategy as well as the MAH's confidential strategies for managing its clinical development programme.
153 That and other information, which is not in the public domain and for which the author has taken
154 active steps to maintain confidential, would damage the company's commercial interests if made
155 public. In this regard, the Commission has recently stated that "keeping valuable information secret is
156 often the only or the most effective way that companies have to protect their intellectual property
157 (such as the results of their research and innovation efforts)".¹

158 If clinical-trial data were made public, know-how and trade secrets would be disclosed. The efforts
159 incurred in by companies are high; the costs are ever-increasing, thus companies treat the know-how
160 in research and development in their therapeutic areas as highly confidential and take considerable
161 care to avoid such information being available to competitors. Lack of protection would as a result
162 lead to impeding innovation and an increase of clinical trials conducted in third countries with a view to
163 safeguarding innovation and intellectual property. This would also contradict the main objective of the
164 current Commission proposal on clinical trials (COM(2012) 369), namely to improve the legal
165 framework for clinical trials within the EU in order to increase the number of trials performed within the
166 Union and to support clinical research and development.

167 On the judicial side, the Court of Justice of the European Union (the Court) has held in several cases
168 that there exists a general presumption that documents submitted by a party to a specific
169 administrative procedure and thus confidentiality under Article 4(2) of Regulation 1049/2001 should be
170 favoured.² In case C-139/07, the Court held that

171 *[...] for the purposes of interpreting the exception laid down in Article 4(2), third indent, of Regulation No*
172 *1049/2001, the General Court should, in the judgment under appeal, have taken account of the fact that*
173 *interested parties other than the Member State concerned in the procedures for reviewing State aid do*
174 *not have the right to consult the documents in the Commission's administrative file, and, therefore, have*
175 *acknowledged the existence of a general presumption that disclosure of documents in the administrative*
176 *file in principle undermines protection of the objectives of investigation activities (paragraph 61).*

177 *That general presumption does not exclude the right of those interested parties to demonstrate that a*
178 *given document disclosure of which has been requested is not covered by that presumption, or that*
179 *there is a higher public interest justifying the disclosure of the document concerned by virtue of Article*
180 *4(2) of Regulation No 1049/2001 (paragraph 62).*

¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/consultations/2012/trade-secrets_en.htm

² Case C-477/10 P, Agrofert Holding v Commission, Judgment of 28 June 2012

181 In case C-404/10, the Court acknowledged again the existence of such presumptions, noting that
182 "such general presumptions are applicable to merger control proceedings because the legislation
183 governing those procedures also lays down strict rules as regards the treatment of information
184 obtained or established in those proceedings" (paragraph 118).

185 This view was also endorsed in case C-477/10P, where the Court held that "the first and third indents
186 of Article 4(2) of Regulation No 1049/2001, interpreted in the light of the specific legislation on merger
187 control proceedings, enables the Commission to apply a general presumption that the disclosure of the
188 documents exchanged with the notifying parties and with third parties in the context of such control
189 proceedings undermines, in principle, the protection of the commercial interests involved and the
190 protection of the purpose of investigations relating to those proceedings, without the Commission
191 being obliged to carry out a concrete and individual examination of those documents" (paragraph 84).

192 The Court has also acknowledged that where applications for a marketing authorisation in the abridged
193 procedure are concerned, national authorities do not disclose clinical data to patients and therefore do
194 not prejudice its confidentiality (Case C-457/10 P):

195 *As regards the appellants' argument that AZ still held exclusive rights over the clinical data in the file*
196 *which were still confidential, that argument fails to have regard to the fact that, as the General Court*
197 *observed at paragraph 681 of the judgment under appeal, Directive 65/65 in any event created a*
198 *limitation to those alleged rights by establishing, in point 8(a)(iii) of the third paragraph of Article 4*
199 *thereof, an abridged procedure which, after the expiry of a period of exclusivity of six or ten years,*
200 *allows the national authorities to rely on that data and the manufacturers of essentially similar medicines*
201 *to benefit from its existence for the purposes of being granted a MA. The General Court was therefore*
202 *fully entitled to find, at paragraphs 670, 674, 680 and 830 of the judgment under appeal, that*
203 *Directive 65/65 no longer gave AZ the exclusive right to make use of the results of the pharmacological*
204 *and toxicological tests and clinical trials included in the file (paragraph 151).*

205 *Moreover, in so far as the national authorities do not disclose that data to applicants in the context of*
206 *the abridged procedure, the finding of the second abuse, as the Commission points out, does not result*
207 *in competitors being granted access to the clinical data and does not prejudice its confidentiality*
208 *(paragraph 152).*

209 **b. Consistency with Regulation 1049/2001.** A consistent approach with Regulation 1049/2001
210 should be adopted whereby, first, the Agency should not assume that data is not commercially
211 confidential without considering the data on an individual basis; and second, it should judge whether or
212 not there is an overriding public interest, for which the purpose of the request is critical to determining
213 the public interest in disclosure/publication.

214 **c. Confidentiality of bilateral agreements.** Bilateral agreements normally protect strategic
215 partnerships in the development of know-how in research and development of the product and the
216 underpinning technology. Such agreements usually contain a confidentiality clause upon the
217 contracting parties that is actionable in case of breach. It is generally expected that the confidential
218 nature of such information (particularly that concerning the manufacturing and control of the product
219 and detailed pre-clinical testing data and clinical strategic plan) is respected by the competent
220 authorities during the course of the regulatory review.

221 **d. Regulatory data protection.** Enforcement of regulatory data protection, unlike patents, is the
222 responsibility of the regulatory authorities. Information contained in clinical-trial studies is submitted
223 to the regulatory authorities as part of, and solely for, the granting of a marketing authorisation. This
224 protection is particularly important where no patent protection is present for a product or indication, as
225 provided for in Article 14(11) of Regulation 726/2004 and Article 10(1) of Directive 2001/83/EC.

226 Regulatory data protection is a vital incentive for research and development of new medicines.
227 Proactive disclosure would have the effect of undermining data exclusivity and would support MAA by
228 competitors, either in the EU or elsewhere, by allowing third parties to circumvent existing regulatory
229 data protection rules or by taking advantage of the absence of such rules. This would leave innovators
230 with little inducement to undertake the investment necessary to develop new cures and treatments
231 options for patients.

232 The Australian legislation, for instance, provides 5 years of data exclusivity to certain active
233 components of new therapeutic goods on condition that the information is not available to the public.
234 In addition, in the EU there have been situations in which competitors (e.g. generic companies) have
235 attempted to use data obtained in this way for the purposes of submitting their own regulatory

236 application. This calls for a robust system whereby the Agency conducts a case-by-case analysis
237 taking into consideration the nature of the information to disclose, the recipient of the information and
238 the purpose for disclosure.

239 The Commission, in its current proposal for a Regulation on clinical trials, states that “clinical trials are
240 an indispensable part of clinical research which in, turn, is essential to develop medicines and improve
241 medical treatment. Without clinical trials, there would be no new medicines, no further development
242 of existing medicines, and no evidence-based improvement of treatments with medicines”.³ Therefore,
243 transparency measures must not undermine the legitimate intellectual property or regulatory data
244 protection rights which exist in law to encourage and safeguard the innovative research and
245 development of medicines.

246 **e. Public interest.** Publication of commercially confidential information contained in the MAA is
247 not generally justified by an overriding public interest in disclosure: publication as such does not lead
248 to an improvement of public health. It is vital that the Agency assesses whether or not information is
249 well suited for publication and guides the public in its use.

250 Competitors would be favoured by this publication, as proved by the fact that the majority of current
251 requests for access to documents are from industry. Competitors can use this data, a) to avoid
252 conducting their own clinical trials, and b) to obtain a marketing authorisation either in the EU or
253 elsewhere. The Agency should adopt a proportionate approach whereby information of a commercially
254 confidential nature or such that could prejudice intellectual property rights should not be disclosed
255 unless a genuine overriding public interest is present.

256 In this regard, access to clinical-trial data should be provided within an appropriate framework which
257 ensures that that overriding public interest is served and that the data are appropriately used and
258 protected in terms of data privacy, intellectual property rights and commercially confidential
259 information considerations. The terms of such access should be based on the nature and purpose of
260 the request and be accompanied by appropriate safeguards to prevent commercially confidential
261 information and intellectual property rights being undermined by further disclosure and use of the
262 data.

263 **f. Existing transparency measures.** Transparency in the interest of public health is well served
264 by a number of provisions in Regulation 726/2004 whereby a comprehensive set of transparency
265 measures makes documents available to the public and healthcare professionals e.g., the EU Clinical
266 Trials Register and EPAR.

267 **g. Protection under TRIPS.** The EU is a party to the WTO and thus bound by the Agreement on
268 Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), in particular Article 39(3). Clinical-trial
269 data are undisclosed test data and hence must be protected under TRIPS. The European Commission
270 has recognised, in a case involving Turkey, that:

271 *With respect to protection against non-disclosure (the confidentiality obligation), the interpretation to be*
272 *given clearly implies that the undisclosed data generated by the originator may not be disclosed to*
273 *anyone other than those few officials who need to use it for marketing authorisation purposes of the*
274 *particular innovative/original products concerned. Under the confidentiality principle, it is self-evident*
275 *that the undisclosed data cannot be disclosed to and eventually used by generics manufacturers in order*
276 *to enable them to produce by reference their own data.*

277 *Further, the principle of confidentiality implies that there must be efforts taken to safeguard the data*
278 *against impermissible disclosure, thus leading to a satisfactory, effective and reliable overall protection*
279 *system.*⁴

280 The Agency is therefore obliged to protect undisclosed test or other data under Article 39.3 TRIPS since
281 it forms an integral part of the Union’s legal order.

³ Commission’s proposal for a Regulation of the EU Parliament and of the Council on clinical trials on medicines for human use, and repealing Directive 2001/20/EC, COM (2012) 369 final, 17.7.2012, page 2, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/health/files/clinicaltrials/2012_07/proposal/2012_07_proposal_en.pdf

⁴ Report to the Trade Barriers regulation Committee. TBR proceedings concerning Turkish practices affecting trade in pharmaceutical products. European Commission, Directorate-General for Trade, of 13 September 2004

282 **h. Lack of a legal basis.** A proactive disclosure would require a clear legal basis, which neither
283 Regulation 726/2004 nor Regulation 1049/2001 provide at present. Following the example set by the
284 regulatory procedures for novel foods, Directive 2001/83/EC and Regulation 726/2004 could be
285 amended to include each a provision allowing for the submission of complete, confidential application,
286 and a public version where the commercial and private confidential information is deleted.

287 **i. Personal data and informed consent of clinical-trial subjects.** As a precondition for
288 allowing researchers to undertake trials within their jurisdictions, some countries require that there be
289 no secondary research uses of participant data without additional permissions from national
290 authorities, and or unless their own native citizen-scientists are included as co-authors on additional
291 publications that have re-used participant-level data. Therefore, if the Agency were to bind
292 pharmaceutical companies to make participant-level data available from completed clinical trials used
293 to support MAA, then this could effectively conflict with the conditions under which some trials were
294 done in various non-EU jurisdictions.

295 Furthermore, under current legislation of personal data protection, any disclosure of personal data
296 affecting clinical-trial subjects must be expressly consented by the individual subjects. The informed
297 consent given for past and existing clinical trials may not have encompassed the disclosure of personal
298 data identifiers to the public (nor even, in some cases, to the regulatory authorities) under the newly
299 envisaged process.

300 It is important to note that the limitations of the informed consent given by the trial subject with
301 regard to the possible uses of the clinical-trial data are also an important ethical/medico-legal
302 consideration, independent of data privacy and confidentiality.

303 **j. Patent protection.** Patents do not only relate to active substances but also to, *inter alia*,
304 formulations, isomeric and crystal forms, pro-drugs and metabolites, processes, further medical uses,
305 dosing regimes, combination therapies, drug-drug interactions, contra-indications and safety
306 measures, etc. Information underpinning inventions relating to any of those can be found in clinical
307 and non-clinical-trial data, and it is possible that marketing authorisation applicants create these
308 inventions through analysis of the information provided in the MAA. Hence, the Agency's proactive
309 publication policy could prejudice later patent filing on subsequent inventions made on known
310 products.

311 The effect that this could have on the market is that companies will have to make a judgment as to
312 when it is more profitable to file their MAA in the EU. If they find that the most profitable option is to
313 do it outside the EU, they will only submit a MAA in the EU when it has obtained all the possible value
314 from the clinical-trial data generated to back such a MAA. As a result, this will delay the progress of
315 medicines onto the EU market as well as EU patients' access to new drugs.

316 **k. Conflicting messages.** Proactive publication carries the risk of publication of a host of
317 sponsored analyses and conflicting messages. Confusion could mount among medical practitioners if
318 unsubstantiated claims regarding the safety and efficacy of medicines find their way into the public
319 domain. Wrong conclusions about medicines could also be drawn.

320 **l. Legitimate expectations.** The Agency must respect the legitimate expectations of MAH at the
321 time of submitting their MAA, who were unaware that the Agency intended to disclose part of the MAA
322 submitted for the sole purposes of obtaining a marketing authorisation. Therefore, the new Agency's
323 policy should only affect data submitted after its adoption.

324 **2. Copyright**

325 On copyright, the discussion has been much more limited than with the issue of commercially
326 confidential information. Various options have been highlighted to ensure that the Agency is not found
327 in breach of copyright or even database rights.

328 Article 16 of Regulation 1049/2001 only addresses the obligations of third parties in terms of
329 copyright, yet it illustrates its general importance. Clinical study reports are drafted in a specific way
330 to clearly and comprehensively present the result of the clinical trial and are carefully worded;
331 similarly, compilations of individual trial subject data can be protected as databases. Therefore, the
332 Agency should respect the copyright therein present.

333 Furthermore, the option of access on the spot should be favoured rather than the sending of
334 documents, which are normally subject to copyright or database right protection.

335 It was also suggested that the Agency should adopt a system whereby a license would be granted in
336 order to use the data only for non-commercial purposes and to restrict its use to only assessing the
337 benefit-risk balance of the authorised product. Article 16 of Regulation 1049/2001 gives a proper legal
338 basis for this differential access. Two reasons support this differential licensing policy: a) it satisfies
339 the public interest in ensuring that, where required, the Agency provides full data sets to organisations
340 properly concerned with an independent analysis of these data in the interest of patient safety; and b)
341 if such a policy was not developed, the Agency could be found in breach of the copyright of the
342 applicant's documents, and even contributing to the copyright breach caused by a third-party making
343 use of the documents (*contributory liability*).

344 It was also proposed that the Agency should use a symbol or alike to anticipate future usage of
345 clinical-trial data documents.

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347 **3. Legal Remedies**

348 The advice provided by the Group points to the reinforcement of the current system of legal remedies.

349 At present, before the Agency implements a decision to give access to documents that goes against
350 the opinion expressed by the MAH in a previous consultation, or where no consultation has taken place
351 because the Agency considers that the documents can be disclosed, it gives him ten working-days to
352 file an order before the General Court of the European Union to suspend the implementation of the
353 decision (interim relief). The request for interim relief is normally accompanied by an order to annul
354 the decision.

355 Some participants have suggested the reinforcement of the present system of legal remedies system in
356 the event of disagreement, for instance, by introducing an in-house formal appeal system to hear
357 claims about commercial confidentiality.

358 It has been also suggested that the Agency should always consult the MAH unless he has indicated in
359 advance that there are no confidentiality concerns.

360 Other participants consider that the current ten working-day timeframe to seek interim relief is too
361 short: it should be extended to the standard 2 months and 10 days to be in line with actions for
362 annulment. This would be justified by the general principle of effective legal remedies, as enshrined in
363 Article 47 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

364 A comment submitted to the Agency noted that consideration should be given for an independent
365 review of the decision for disclosure conducted by a neutral third-party. One participant pointed out,
366 however, that in case T-201/04 Microsoft v Commission, the Court held that any decision to abdicate
367 the role entrusted to the Agency under Regulation 1049/2001 to decide whether or not a document
368 can be released, would be contrary to EU law.

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