SPECIALIST UPDATES **RHEUMATOLOGY**

Adalimumab biosimilars now on PBS

And after the first continuing scripts, all will be on streamlined authority

2 minutes to read

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By Clare Pain

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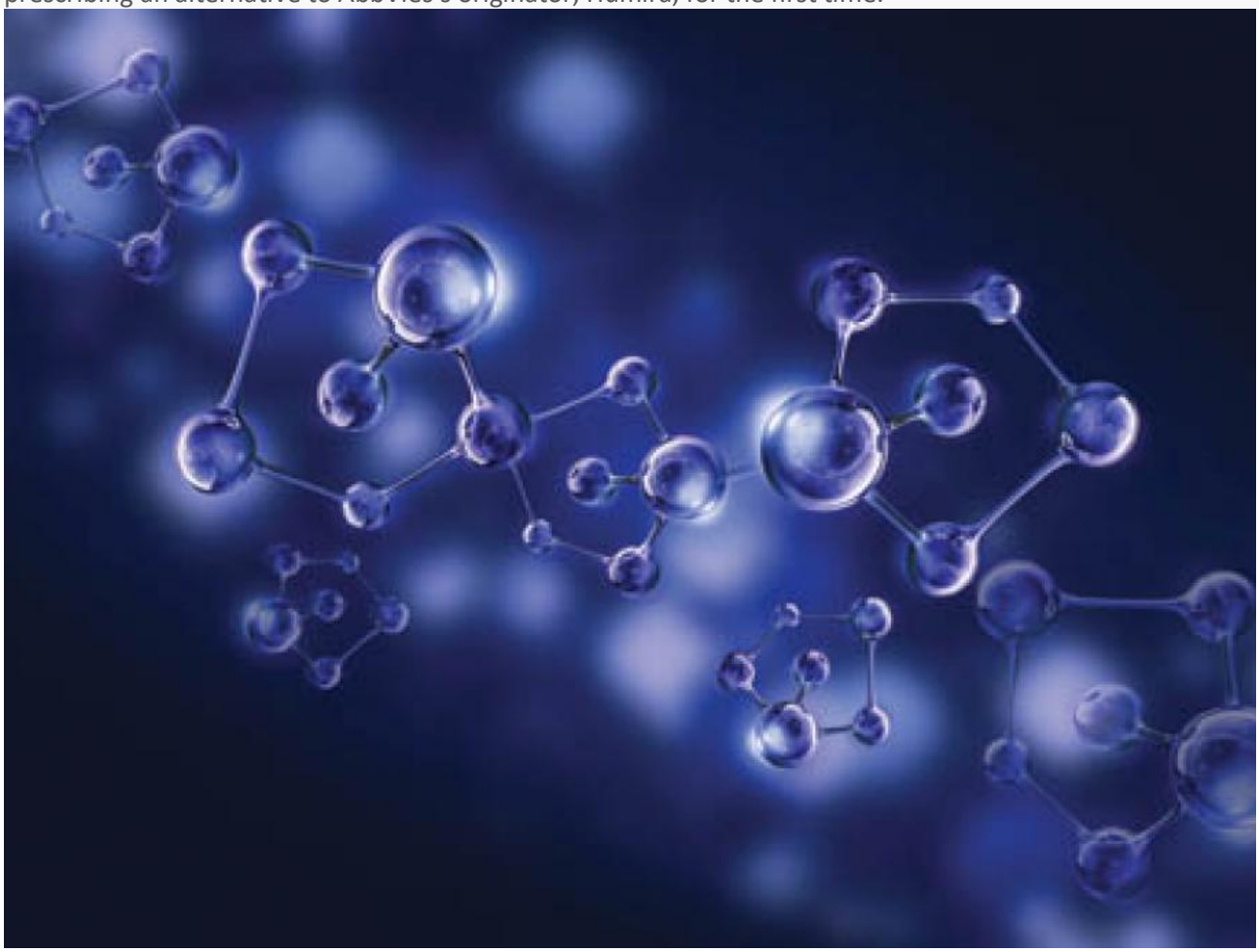
Four adalimumab biosimilars are now available on the PBS, giving Australian rheumatologists the option of prescribing an alternative to AbbVies's originator, Humira, for the first time.



The new biosimilars are Amgevita (Amgen), Hadlima (MSD), Hyrimoz (Sandoz), and Idacio (Fresenius Kabi) and, like Humira, they're indicated for severe disease in active rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, active juvenile idiopathic arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis.

The biosimilars are 'a-flagged', meaning that they can be substituted for each other and for the originator (at the same dose and strength) by a dispensing pharmacist, unless the prescribing doctor has stipulated that brand substitution should not occur.

The secretary of the Australian Rheumatology Association Dr Helen Cooley says the four biosimilars can be prescribed with streamlined authority for continuing use but this is only after the first continuing use script.

This requirement is less stringent than the full written or digital authority script required for continuing use for the originator adalimumab, she says.

For initial and first continuing scripts, the originator and biosimilar adalimumab formulations are on a par, with all requiring full written or digital authority.

The streamlining of the biosimilars is one of the Federal Government's "biosimilar uptake drivers", intended to encourage doctors to prescribe the biosimilar, and increase market competition.

The other uptake driver is the government's "encouragement" to rheumatologists to choose a biosimilar as initial treatment for patients starting biologic therapy.

"Most of us would probably not be uncomfortable starting the patient on a biosimilar but would be more wary of switching a patient who is already on the originator," says Dr Cooley, who practises in Hobart.

She says the streamlining of continuing use provides "a small carrot" to rheumatologists in that it's less burdensome than obtaining a written or digital authority script.

But in actual practice, obtaining streamlined authority could still take a significant amount of the doctor's time.

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Rheumatologists are keen to help the government save costs providing it's not at the expense of efficacy for the patient, she says.

It's not known what price the government is paying to the various pharmaceutical companies involved, she adds.

Costs for the patient are the same, at $41.30 per script ($6.60 for concessions), regardless of the brand prescribed.

The listings for the new biosimilars have coincided with listing of a new citrate-free and smaller volume Humira formulation, which had been shown to reduce injection site pain compared to the original formulation, which it will now replace, according to PBS advice to health professionals.

Older formulations of Humira can no longer be prescribed but supply will be maintained for a year so that existing scripts can be filled.

While Humira packs will still be available as two, four or six doses, all the biosimilars are available in two-dose packs only (either syringes or pens).

All biosimilars are supplied in a 40mg syringe and pen form, while Amgevita is also available as a 20mg syringe.

More information:

- **PBS factsheet on adalimumab biosimilars for health professionals**
- **Biosimilar uptake drivers**
- **April 1st addendum to the PBS**

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