

Publication : ET (print)
Date : June 10, 2016
Page : 13
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Rel Lifesciences Unveils First Copy of Avastin Cancer Drug

Reliance to market the drug under its own brand; also ties up with Lupin to sell it

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Mumbai: Reliance Lifesciences, the biopharmaceutical unit of Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries, has launched the world's first biosimilar, or copies, of bevacizumab, a complex medicine used to treat at least six forms of advanced cancers. Reliance's product is approved by the Indian regulator for use in cases of colorectal cancer.

Swiss biotechnology powerhouse Roche is the innovator of bevacizumab and markets it globally as Avastin. The product had annual sales in excess of \$7 billion last year. While Reliance will market the bevacizumab copies under its own brand name Bevacirel, it has also entered into a "principal-to-principal agreement" with Mumbai-based drug maker Lupin, two top industry persons familiar with the matter told ET.

In 2014, Reliance had entered into a similar arrangement with Torrent Pharma to sell copies of three drugs — rituximab, adalimumab and cetuximab.

With the latest introduction of bevacizumab in the Indian market, Reliance has a stable of four complex biotech drugs

A Shot in the Arm

Market size of bevacizumab in India: ₹170 cr annually

	Roche's Avastin	Reliance's Bevacirel
100 mg:	₹29,500	₹28,300
400 mg:	₹1,08,000	₹1,05,000

Why copies of expensive biotech drug matters?

Copies of top-selling biotech drugs for cancer patients may help lower income group patients to get access to affordable medicines in countries like India

that are launched first time globally. It had introduced a recombinant chorionic gonadotrophin hormone used in assisted reproduction, interferon beta for the treatment of multiple sclerosis, and reteplase, a drug used in the management of myocardial infarction.

A Reliance official declined to comment on the development. A Lupin spokesperson did not respond to requests for com-

ments until the time of going to press. Reliance's bevacizumab is expected to compete with Roche's brand, but unlike most biosimilar launches, where the cut price versions are sold at roughly 25% discount over the innovator's price, market sources said Reliance has kept a minuscule gap between the price of its product and that of Roche.

Roche's Avastin of 100 mg strength is learnt to be sold at about 29,500 while Reliance may market its product at ₹28,300 per injection. For the 400 mg variant, Avastin is available at about ₹1,08,000 and Reliance's drug is sold at ₹1,05,000 for each injection.

Market sources estimated the market at about Rs 170 crore, but added that a wider market footprint of Lupin and Reliance will accelerate the reach.

ROCHE-HETERO HIGH COURT SLUGFEST

The launch of Reliance's bevacizumab comes amid a legal tussle between Hyderabad-based drug maker Hetero and Roche. Last month, the Swiss firm had moved the Delhi High Court to block the introduction of copies from Hetero, questioning the examination process followed by the Indian drug controller in approving the product.