ECCO 2013 survey highlights lack of confidence in biosimilars

Results of a survey carried out by the European Crohn's and Colitis Organisation (ECCO) highlight a lack of confidence in biosimilars and the need for continued education.

The results of the ECCO 2013 survey [1] were presented by Dr Alessandro Armuzzi, together with the EU physician 2013 survey on naming, transparency and traceability for biosimilars conducted by the Alliance for Safe Biologic Medicines [2] at the EuropaBio (European Association for Bioindustries) roundtable held on 18 March 2014 in Brussels, Belgium.

The survey was carried out in order to study whether inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) specialists were aware of biosimilars. The survey consisted of a 15-question anonymous web survey, for which ECCO members were randomly invited by email to participate.

Of the 307 ECCO members that completed the survey, most (69.5%) realized that monoclonal antibody biosimilars were 'similar' but not identical to their respective originator biological. The majority of respondents (89.4%) also thought that such biosimilars would be cheaper than the originator products. On the other hand, 62.4% of respondents thought that monoclonal antibody biosimilars were more complex compared to other biosimilars and therefore more at risk of 'not being similar enough'.

Substitution

On the subject of pharmacist substitution of originator biologicals by biosimilars, 85% of respondents were not in favour of automatic substitution, although 18% would support such substitution for new prescriptions.

Interchangeability

When considering interchangeability of originator biologicals and biosimilars, most of the respondents (63.7%) said that they would not switch a patient onto a biosimilar monoclonal antibody as there is no disease-specific evidence about their interchangeability.

Confidence

When questioned as to whether they were confident about prescribing biosimilars, less than half (39%) of respondents felt confident. The majority (61%) of respondents were either not confident (32.7%) or only a little confident (28.3%) about prescribing biosimilars.

Dr Armuzzi concluded that IBD specialists are generally informed about biosimilars and see them as an opportunity to reduce costs. However, they do not see biosimilars as interchangeable and are not confident about the use of biosimilars in clinical practice.

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