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Task force to ensure large savings on medicine

Amgros has just completed its largest-ever tendering procedure for biological pharmaceuticals, including the world's top-selling drug: Humira. Now it is time to realise the savings as quickly as possible. Denmark is so efficient that other countries refer to us as a centre of excellence.

With the new contracts, Amgros expects savings of at least DKK 420 million next year. Now that the contracts with the suppliers have been signed, it is time to realise the savings as quickly as possible. This cannot be achieved until physicians at Danish hospitals start using the new and far less expensive drugs.

Denmark has very good experience with switching to new drugs. In fact, we are so good that other countries have been drawing lessons from us for a long time, and they are now referring to Denmark as a centre of excellence in the art of implementing new biosimilar drugs and reaping major savings fast.

But how fast is fast?

Very fast, according to figures from the international IQVIA Institute. IQVIA has examined how fast different European countries have previously implemented the biosimilar drugs infliximab and etanercept. Denmark is at the very top of the list - before countries such as Norway, Germany and the UK.

The figures show that Denmark has successfully started up more than 90% of the new biosimilar drugs within just two-three months. We hope to achieve the same result when implementing the new large tendering procedure from Amgros.

> "When we attend conferences abroad, physicians and the pharmaceutical industry talk about Denmark as a centre of excellence. Because here in Denmark, we've established a very special setup and established collaboration with stakeholders who can help to ensure that we start using new biosimilar drugs as quickly as possible. The challenge we need to address is that switching to new drugs cannot be left to one party alone. We'll only succeed if we all work together. And together, we've actually come a long way," said Flemming Sonne, CEO at Amgros.

Carefully planned process

To make sure that physicians switch to biosimilar drugs as quickly as possible, Denmark has set up a task force in which Danish Regions, the Danish Medicines Council secretariat and Amgros are represented. We have carefully planned the entire process of implementing new biosimilar drugs. And we will follow the same plan when we start implementing the contracts from Amgros' new large tendering procedure.

> "To be as successful as possible, it's essential that all links in the chain work together - from suppliers over Amgros and hospital pharmacies to hospitals. So there's every reason to thank everyone involved in this process - not least the clinicians who are now facing the major task of helping patients switch to the new biosimilar drugs," said Birgitte Klindt Poulsen, head consultant at the Department of Clinical Pharmacology, University Hospital of Aalborg, and a member of the task force as well as the Danish Medicines Council.

Savings from day one

As part of the work at the task force, in connection with the tendering procedure that has just been completed, Amgros helped prepare information material for patients to make sure they understand why

they are switching to a new drug, and what the switch implies. We spoke with patient organisations to help them feel confident in having patients switch to biosimilar drugs.

Together with the task force, we also made sure that the clinical staff was well prepared to start using the new drugs. We have maintained close dialogue with suppliers to encourage them to deliver as quickly as possible. And hospitals have run down their stocks to make room for the new biosimilar drugs when they arrive at hospital pharmacies and medicine rooms.

> "The hospital pharmacies play a crucial role in starting new and less costly medicines as soon as they become available. We take a very systematic approach and make sure not to purchase expensive pharmaceuticals when we know that new and cheaper drugs are on their way. Our experience in this area is so good now that we help to ensure that the regions save money from day one when new pharmaceuticals become available. Leading up to the introduction of cheaper medicines, we've even managed to reduce the amount of medicine we would usually give to patients. This means we benefit from the savings even before day one," said Lars Nielsen, hospital pharmacist at the Capital Region of Denmark.

The agreements between Amgros and the suppliers who won the contract will take effect on 1 January 2019, but from mid-November 2018, physicians at Danish public hospitals can start using the new biosimilar drugs.

Facts about the historically large tendering procedure
When we say that Amgros has just completed its largest-ever tendering procedure for biological pharmaceuticals, including the top-selling drug Humira, this is because the pharmaceuticals covered by the tender overall represent an annual turnover of DKK 1.6 billion. The patent for the blockbuster drug Humira recently expired, and Humira alone represented an annual turnover of around DKK 420 million.

Facts
Appendix: The appendix shows how fast countries in Europe start using new drugs.

Biological pharmaceuticals

A biological pharmaceutical differs from other types of pharmaceuticals in that it is produced from biological material (from humans, animals or plants) or by genetic engineering. By far the majority of biological pharmaceuticals in use today are produced through genetic engineering, using cells from a mammal, yeast cells or bacteria to produce the drug molecule. A biological pharmaceutical often has a far more complex molecule structure than a synthetically (chemical, non-biological) manufactured pharmaceutical.

Biosimilars
A biosimilar is a new version of an existing biological pharmaceutical (reference drug) that must have been approved (in the EU) for no less than 10 years. Biosimilars may have certain minor molecular differences compared with the original version of the pharmaceutical, but these differences may not impact the effect and safety (side effects) of the biosimilar compared with the original biological pharmaceutical.

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