



Reuters Health Information (2020-11-19): Roche's Actemra helps the sickest COVID-19 patients, study shows

CATEGORIES

Biotechnology

ABSTRACT

By John Miller

ZURICH (Reuters) - Roche's Actemra helped the sickest COVID-19 patients in a 303-patient study, the trial's lead investigator said on Thursday, bolstering what has been mixed evidence that the arthritis drug can be repurposed to help in the pandemic.

Actemra, an anti-inflammation drug also called tocilizumab, reached a key efficacy endpoint among critically ill patients, compared with patients who did not get immune modulation treatments, according to early REMAP-CAP trial data.

Anthony Gordon, Imperial College London professor of anaesthesia and critical care, said it remained unclear if Actemra kept people alive or shortened how long they needed intensive care support like mechanical ventilation, or both. Those details should be published in a couple of weeks, he said.

Even without specific data, however, Gordon said the study's early signal was robust, with a 99.75% probability that Actemra is better than getting no immune system modulator.

While survival benefit would be ideal, cutting need for intensive care support is also important, since it would reduce the burden on hospitals where occupancy has swelled during the second wave of coronavirus infections.

"We still think that is important," Gordon said on a call with reporters. "But obviously, we hope it improves both, and we're looking for that."

Actemra's trial results against COVID-19 have been mixed.

Roche said in September it helped cut the need for ventilators in hospitalised patients with COVID-19, though the drug failed in a separate study of patients hospitalised with severe COVID-19 related pneumonia.

Other treatments including interferon-beta-1a, interleukin-1 receptor antagonist and Sanofi's arthritis drug Kevzara are also in the REMAP-CAP study, but results are not yet available.

Gordon said the trial's placebo arm - in which patients got no immune modulator - would now be stopped and new patients would get the treatments.

The REMAP-CAP trial separately concluded that AbbVie's AIDS drug cocktail lopinavir/ritonavir didn't help in COVID-19, mirroring results from earlier studies.

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