

Pharmacy department

# For patients changing from intravenous Herceptin® to a trastuzumab biosimilar

One of the medicines your doctor has previously prescribed for you, trastuzumab (Herceptin®) is called a biologic medicine. Instead of the biologic, The Christie now uses a biosimilar trastuzumab in its place. This leaflet will help you understand more about biologic and biosimilar medicines, but if you have any questions please ask your pharmacist, nurse or doctor.

## What is a biologic?

Biologic medicines are made by living cells in a controlled way, rather than being built as synthetic chemicals like regular medicines, such as tablets. Think of them in the same way that bread or yoghurt is made using living cells. The original biologics were first used to treat people with serious illnesses in the UK over 20 years ago and they have improved life for millions of people worldwide.

## What is a biosimilar?

You may have heard of some medicines you take described as generics, for example supermarket own brand ibuprofen is the generic version of Nurofen®. Generics are exact copies of the original medicine and are relatively simple to copy and manufacture. The same idea applies to biosimilars, but it is not possible to make an exact copy of an original biologic medicine due to their size and the complex way they are made. Biosimilars are highly similar to the original medicine but not identical. They have been thoroughly tested to show no difference in terms of how the medicine works, its effectiveness and safety.

## How can I be confident it will work the same?

The companies that make biosimilars have to show the licensing authority very strict evidence of their effectiveness, safety and quality. Clinical studies have to be conducted in a large group of people to show that the medicine works just as well and is just as safe as the original biologic. Biosimilars take several years and cost many millions of pounds to develop and prove that they work in the same way to the original medicine. This is another way biosimilars are different to generics. Generics do not need studies in people with disease and take much less time and money to develop.

## How will the biosimilar medicine be administered?

The biosimilar medicine will be administered in exactly the same way as the original biologic medicine.

## Will I experience different side effects?

Results from clinical trials comparing the biosimilar with the original biologic medicine have shown there to be no difference in the side effects. The European licensing authority has over ten years experience of assessing biosimilar medicines and monitoring their safety profile. Over that time, the authority has not



identified any relevant difference in the nature, severity or frequency of adverse effects between biosimilars and their reference biologic medicines.

## What should I do if I have any problems?

You are monitored in exactly the same way regardless of which brand of trastuzumab you have. All the brands of trastuzumab can cause similar side effects. If you experience any problems with treatment report these promptly to your medical team or call The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658**.

## What are the benefits

You can expect to have the same results from your biosimilar as if you had the original medicine. There is a benefit to the NHS too. Biosimilars are usually provided at a much lower price than the original biologic. This helps the NHS provide complex medicines at better prices and improve treatment for people with conditions like yours.

## Can I choose to receive 'Herceptin®'?

No, the hospital will be switching to the use of the biosimilar medicine for all patients and will no longer be stocking the original biologic medicine.

## Who can I approach for further advice?

If you have further queries about biosimilars, then please do not hesitate to speak to a member of your treating team: your doctor, pharmacist.

[www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org) - search biosimilar

## Acknowledgments:

The Cancer Vanguard 'General Biosimilar Information Leaflet For Patients Changed from Biologic to Biosimilar'.

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact [patient.information@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@christie.nhs.uk)

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

