

Biosimilar Uptake by British Local Formularies: a Cross Sectional Study

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1 **Cover Page**

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9 **Abstract**

10 **Background:** Biological medicines are starting to lose their patent protection, so similar,
11 inexact copies (biosimilars) are being developed and licensed. The high acquisition costs of
12 biologics for healthcare providers could be reduced by switching to biosimilars, thus alleviating
13 budgetary pressures and increasing patient access. Therefore, the acceptance of biosimilars by
14 prescribers in Great Britain (GB; England, Scotland, Wales) needs to be described and
15 understood.

16 **Objective:** To determine uptake of the first wave of biosimilars (somatropin, epoetin,
17 filgrastim) by local formularies (lists of preferred medicines for prescribing in local healthcare
18 settings).

19 **Settings:** This study targeted local formularies in GB.

20 **Method:** In November 2014, local formularies (medicines formularies of Acute Trusts and
21 Health Boards in GB) were screened for their approach to listing of biologics and their
22 biosimilars as well as recommendations on usage of these pharmaceuticals.

23 **Main Outcomes Measures:** Listing frequencies of biosimilars.

24 **Results:** One hundred and forty-six British local formularies were screened. Amongst the 80%
25 of formularies in which brand names were specified, biosimilar filgrastim was the most
26 frequently listed when compared to the other targeted biosimilars. Biosimilars were listed in
27 preference to reference biologic medicine in 49% of local formularies for filgrastim, 11% for
28 somatropin and in only 6% for epoetin.

29 **Conclusion:** Although the market for biosimilars can act in parallel to the generic market, their
30 uptake measured using local British formularies was less than what is expected given that the
31 British market for medicines has a strong focus on generics. Finally, geographical variability
32 within GB requires further investigation.

33

34 **Impacts of findings**

- 35 • As the use of brand names in prescribing and reporting adverse drug reactions is part
36 of active monitoring of biological medicines safety, including the biosimilar medicines,
37 local formularies must actively list these medicines using brand name;
- 38 • Specifying preferred brand for prescribing facilitates and promotes local formularies in
39 guiding cost effective and rational medicines utilisation.

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43 **Introduction**

44 Biological medicines (BMPs) provide an innovative method for treating chronic and life-
45 threatening diseases such as cancers, rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis. Their rapid
46 adoption into clinical practice has resulted in a substantial share of the pharmaceutical market;
47 for example, in 2012-2013, 27% of total pharmaceutical sales in Europe were BMPs [1].
48 Moreover, eight of the top ten bestselling pharmaceuticals in 2013 in Europe were BMPs. It is
49 expected that BMPs will maintain the same market share into 2016 [2,3] and likely beyond.
50 BMPs have significantly improved health and disease outcomes, but their widespread
51 utilisation is financially challenging to healthcare providers worldwide [4].

52 In 2013-2014, in England, seven out of the top ten most prescribed medicines in terms of cost
53 to the National Health Service (NHS) were BMPs [5]. Notable though is that all seven will lose
54 their patent protection by 2018 [6]. Patent expiry creates an opportunity for developing and
55 licensing similar copies of off-patent BMPs-called biosimilar medicines (BSPs) [7]. Unlike
56 conventional generic medicines, BSPs are not identical but similar copies of their reference
57 BMP (R-BMP). The inability to produce identical copies is related to the complex and
58 heterogenic molecular structure of these medicines, and being produced by not fully
59 controllable living systems [4,8].

60 In their analysis of the European BSP market, Rovira et al reported that BSPs offer price
61 reductions of between 10% and 35% [9]. Although this is a modest price reduction in
62 comparison to conventional generic medicines, the overall cost saving to health service
63 providers is expected to be significant due to the high unit costs and extensive use of BMPs
64 [9]. The European Generic Medicines Association reported that the European Union might
65 save upwards of €1.6 billion/year for the scenario in which a 20% price reduction occurs on
66 five off-patent BMPs [10]. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the availability of BSPs
67 might alter medical practice and increase compliance to clinical guidelines [11,12].

68 In Europe, BSPs can be launched after being centrally assessed and licensed by the European
69 Medicines Agency (EMA) for safety, quality and efficacy [8,11]. While the EMA mandates
70 full quality submission in order to license a BSP, it does permit evidence based extrapolation
71 of the clinical outcomes from one tested indication to closely related others [13,14].

72 In Great Britain (GB), the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)
73 directs prescribers to use brand name in prescribing any BMP and its BSPs [15]. Brand name-
74 based prescribing and reporting facilitates capture of safety issues related to BMPs including
75 BSPs [15].

76 Despite being a generically-driven market [16], the uptake of BSPs in Britain seems to have
77 been relatively limited when compared to other European countries [14]. According to the
78 British Generic Manufacturers Association factors related to physicians' lack of confidence in
79 prescribing BSPs, absence of encouraging national policies and banned substitution at
80 pharmacy level have resulted in slow adoption of BSPs [14]. Lack of confidence might relate
81 to physicians questioning the safety and efficacy of BSPs [11]. This might be at least partly
82 explained by the abridged approach the EMA follows in assessing clinical efficacy of BSPs
83 [13]. One exception is granulocyte-colony stimulating factor (G-CSF)-filgrastim BSP, which
84 is achieving an uptake rate similar to that of conventional generic medicinal products [2].

85 One approach to evaluating prescribers' acceptance of BSPs is through assessing uptake of
86 BSPs in local medicines formularies. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
87 (NICE) defines local formularies as "the output processes to support the managed introduction,
88 utilisation or withdrawal of healthcare treatments within a health economy, service or
89 organisation" [17]. Local formularies are working documents that are subject to regular review
90 and change. They tend to be robust on treatments used frequently and weak on occasionally
91 used ones (that need to be available for a complete and comprehensive service). Local
92 formularies can act as prescribing guiding tool at local settings [18]. Heal et al (2004) reported

93 that more than 80% of their study participants were guided by local formularies [19].
94 Accordingly, assessing BSP listing in local formularies might reflect acceptance of these
95 products by prescribers.

96 **Aim of the study**

97 To determine uptake acceptance of first wave BSPs licensed and marketed in GB prior to 2015
98 (somatropin (HGH), epoetin (EPO) and filgrastim (G-CSF)) by local formularies.

99 **Ethics approval**

100 Ethical approval was not needed as local formularies throughout the UK are publically
101 available documents included in the freedom of information scheme.

102 **Method**

103 During November-December 2014, a list of 157¹ Acute Trusts (accountable organisations
104 within NHS England that manage and control the performance, services quality and financial
105 efficiency of clusters of hospitals in England) was acquired from the NHS England website.
106 Details of the 14 Regional Health Boards in Scotland and 7 Local Health Boards in Wales
107 (accountable organisations within NHS Scotland and NHS Wales that are responsible for the
108 delivery of healthcare services to the local population) were acquired from Scottish
109 Government and NHS Wales websites².

¹ As of November 2014, the total number of Acute Trusts in England was 157. It was not possible to obtain the formulary list of two Acute Trusts since one was dissolved and the other one was still in process of developing a formulary list.

² Northern Ireland was excluded as there was an initiative underway to develop a joint formulary for the whole country, and some of its chapters were still under development.

110 The most recent versions of local medicines formularies were downloaded and examined for
111 their listing of targeted R-BMPs and BSPs according to the criteria given in [Table 1](#). These
112 criteria enabled assessment of: (i) uptake of BSPs, (ii) compliance to the MHRA
113 recommendation on brand name prescribing of BMPs, and (iii) the consideration given to
114 population or indication-specific recommendations.

115 The assessment process started by examining whether the listing approach of R-BMP and BSPs
116 was based on using brand name, molecular name or both, as per the British National Formulary
117 (BNF) 68th edition. Then the availability of prescribing guidance in terms of speciality of the
118 prescriber and/or the clinical settings was recorded. Finally, formulary entries were classified
119 and compared according to preferred brand for prescribing. Formulary uptake of targeted
120 BMPs and BSPs was analysed using descriptive statistics in an Excel® 2010 spreadsheet.

121

122 **Results**

123 One hundred and forty-six formularies were identified: 129 in England, 10 in Scotland and 7
124 in Wales. Forty-three percent (63/146) of these were joint formularies (the term given to a local
125 formulary developed and/or used simultaneously by more than one healthcare providing
126 organisation).

127 Formulary uptake and listing approaches varied across the three targeted groups. HGH was
128 listed in 126 formularies achieving the highest percentage of medicine listing, EPO achieved
129 the highest brand name based listing with 60 formularies using brand names. Despite BSP G-
130 CSF being the last of the three groups to be authorised by the EMA, it was most commonly
131 listed in preference to the R-BMP. [Table 2](#) provides more details.

132 Variations between the countries of GB were seen, with 27% of English formularies listing
133 BSP G-CSF in preference to the R-BMP, versus 12.5% and 14.3% amongst Scottish and Welsh

134 formularies, respectively. In the cases of HGH and EPO, 6% and 4% of English formularies
135 preferred BSP over R-BMP; respectively, but no Scottish or Welsh formularies did so.

136 Only six formularies listed at least one BSP from all three targeted groups. There were no
137 instances of BSPs being preferred to R-BMPs across all three targeted groups, but at the
138 opposite extreme there were only two formularies in which R-BMPs were always preferred
139 over BSPs.

140 **Discussion**

141 In this study, formulary uptake of BSPs in three different groups was employed as an indicator
142 of clinical acceptance of BSPs in GB. The uptake of BSPs by British local formularies was less
143 than what might be predicted from a classical generically driven market for medicines, and
144 there appeared to be geographic variability in uptake which requires further investigation.

145 Most frequently listed was HGH, the first licensed BSP [20], however the maximum preference
146 for BSPs over R-BMP was achieved by G-CSF BSPs. On the other hand, brand name-based
147 listing was more frequent in the case of EPO. Despite it not being possible to gain a complete
148 understanding of the variations between targeted groups, it might be explained in large part by
149 the molecular nature, therapy duration and/or patients' demographics, preferences and life
150 style.

151 Having several other medicinal products within the same group where each has different dosing
152 frequencies, administration devices and storage conditions might affect acceptance of BSPs.
153 For example, one HGH product is a needleless device making it more attractive to paediatric
154 and needle-phobic patients. Another HGH product can be stored out of the refrigerator [21]
155 which might make it the brand of choice for frequent travellers.

156 G-CSF's molecular structure and short duration of therapy might increase the acceptance of its
157 BSPs. It is a small, easily characterised non-glycosylated molecule that is indicated for short

158 therapeutic periods [22, 23]. However, special population considerations in terms of patient
159 age and therapeutic indications were flagged in those instances when the R-BMP was listed in
160 preference to BSPs. Specifically, the R-BMP was listed as the preferred product for paediatric
161 patients and for stem cell mobilisation. Reluctance to use BSPs in these settings may be because
162 of the lack of clinical trial evidence of their efficacy and/or safety.

163 EPO achieved the highest percentage of brand name-based listing. This is most likely due to
164 EPO being a glycosylated protein, in which case each brand has a different glycosylation
165 pattern and hence a different immunogenic profile [24]. In addition, previously reported cases
166 of the life threatening pure red cell aplasia might encourage the use of brand name based listing
167 for EPO whether for the R-BMP or the BSPs [24].

168 The MHRA has considered several measures in the monitoring of BMPs, including BSPs, such
169 as: demanding brand name-based prescription, and requiring specification of a product's
170 identifiers (brand name, batch number and manufacturer) in reporting adverse drug reactions.
171 Furthermore, prescribers are directed to inform patients and/or carers about a product's brand
172 name and batch number [15]. However, more than one third of local formularies did not specify
173 brand names when listing BMPs in the groups examined in this study. Unintentional switching
174 between brands might affect patients' safety, if not carefully monitored and managed. Such
175 harm might be avoided in the cases of G-CSF and EPO because of their short duration
176 prescription, but possibly not otherwise for HGH which is typically used for prolonged periods.

177 The limited clinical evidence of BSPs' efficacy has been highlighted as a factor hindering
178 BSPs' acceptance in clinical practice [22]. However, the BSP G-CSF brand that was approved
179 based on results of a pharmacokinetics/pharmacodynamics trial in healthy volunteers instead
180 of patients, and in a non-comparative safety-focussed study in patients [25] -was recommended
181 for use ahead of R-BMP G-CSF in more local formularies than was any other
182 biosimilar/reference pairing.

183 As there is a proposal to assign different international non-proprietary name (INN) for BSPs,
184 BSPs' manufacturers argue that a differing INN might limit the uptake of BSPs by giving
185 suggestion to the view that BSPs are completely different instead of being a highly similar
186 molecule [26]. The effect of different INN was noted in the case of epoetin zeta and epoetin
187 alfa, where despite both being EPO BSP the latter was more often listed than the former.
188 Moreover, 50% of formularies that preferred BSP EPO over the R-BMP have not listed epoetin
189 zeta, while the remaining 50% listed it without brand specification. Of the 27 formularies that
190 did list EPO using its molecular name none included epoetin zeta.

191 Variations in listing BSPs were observed between England, Scotland and Wales. Although
192 both the Scottish Medicines Consortium and the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group have
193 been actively involved in evaluating BSPs [27, 28], Scottish and Welsh formularies were less
194 likely to list BSPs in preference to the R-BMP compared with their English counterparts.

195 Research data and analysis indicate that some formularies encourage BSP prescribing.
196 However, variations and lack of specificity in some formularies may suggest a vague
197 understanding of the concept and nature of BMPs in general, and BSPs in particular, by the
198 professionals involved in developing local formularies.

199 The principal limitation of this study is that the uptake of BSPs has been estimated using local
200 medicines formularies as a proxy for actual prescribing practice. This may not necessarily
201 provide a highly accurate reflection of BSP prescribing, as it is not known to what degree these
202 lists are adhered to.

203 If equally safe and effective as the originator BMP, lower prices for BSPs could potentially
204 increase access to treatment for more patients, or reduce drug spending in an increasingly
205 constrained financial environment. Engagement is required with prescribers, formulary
206 managers and commissioners to understand the basis for formulary decision-making, identify
207 reasons for variation in prescribing behaviour and develop strategies for more uniform uptake

208 of BSPs. Educational interventions are also needed around adherence to standards of
209 pharmacovigilance to assure drug monitoring and patient safety.

210

211 **Conclusion**

212 The results of this study suggest that the uptake of BSPs in Britain is highly variable, and
213 generally less than what is expected, given historically that its market for pharmaceuticals is
214 very much generically driven. Further work is needed to understand why there is such low and
215 variable uptake.

216

Table 1**Table 1-** Formulary assessment criteria

No.	Assessment Criterion	Definition				
1.	Is this formulary a joint formulary? (Yes/No)	Formulary list that is developed and/or used by more than one healthcare setting (primary and/or secondary care).				
2.	Is the targeted medicine listed? (Yes/No)	BNF chapter 6.5.1*: somatropin (HGH) BNF chapter 9.1.3**: epoetin alfa (EPO) BNF chapter 9.1.6***: filgrastim (G-CSF)				
3.	How it is listed? (formulary/non-formulary)	<table border="0"> <tr> <td data-bbox="963 718 1153 750">Formulary</td> <td data-bbox="1164 718 2105 750">Medicinal product that is routinely available for prescription.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="963 845 1153 877">Non-formulary</td> <td data-bbox="1164 829 2105 893">Medicinal product that is not routinely available for prescription. However, if it is deemed needed, it will be made available for the patient.</td> </tr> </table>	Formulary	Medicinal product that is routinely available for prescription.	Non-formulary	Medicinal product that is not routinely available for prescription. However, if it is deemed needed, it will be made available for the patient.
Formulary	Medicinal product that is routinely available for prescription.					
Non-formulary	Medicinal product that is not routinely available for prescription. However, if it is deemed needed, it will be made available for the patient.					
4.	What is the listing approach? (Brand name/INN/Both)	As per brands listed in BNF chapters 6.5.1, 9.1.3 and 9.1.6.				
5.	What are the listed brands? (R-BMP/BSP/Both)	BNF chapter 6.5.1: 1 R-BMP and 1 BSP BNF chapter 9.1.3: 1 R-BMP and 2 BSPs BNF chapter 9.1.6: 1 R-BMP and 3 BSPs				

6.	What is the preferred type? (R-BMP/BSP/Not specified)	Being the only listed brand/type; Clearly stated that this brand/type is the preferred for prescription; or Brand/type listed as formulary while other brands/type listed as non-formulary.
7.	Are there clear restrictions in prescribing? (Yes/No)	Whether or not there are specified restrictions in terms of who can prescribe these products and/or prescribing settings i.e. primary or secondary care.
8.	Is there specified brand of choice? (Yes/No)	If it is clearly stated that a specific brand is considered as the brand of choice.
9.	Are there special population considerations? (Yes/No)	If there are considerations related to patients' age, medical history and/or life style factors that might affect type/brand of preference (R-BMP or BSP).
10.	Are there special indications' considerations? (Yes/No)	If there are considerations related to indications that might affect type/brand of preference (R-BMP or BSP).

BNF: British National Formulary 68th Edition; **BMP:** Biological medicinal product; **BSP:** Biosimilar medicinal product; **INN:** International non-proprietary name(molecular name);
R-BMP: Reference biological medicinal product

***6.5.1:** Drugs used in hypothalamic and anterior pituitary hormones and anti-oestrogen; 1 R-BMP and 1 BSP brand

****9.1.3:** Drugs used in hypoplastic, haemolytic, and renal anaemias; 1 R-BMP and 2 BSP brands

*****9.1.6:** Drugs used in neutropenia; 1 R-BMP and 3 BSP brands

Table 2

Table 2- Results Summary

Investigated Attributes	Medicine Group		
	Filgrastim (G-CSF)	Epoetin alfa (EPO)	Somatropin (HGH)
Medicine being listed			
<i>Not listed</i>	27 (18%)	31 (21%)	20 (14%)
<i>Listed as Formulary</i>	115 (79%)	107 (73%)	120 (82%)
<i>Listed as Non-formulary</i>	4 (3%)	8 (6%)	6 (4%)
Total	146	146	146
Clear Prescription Restrictions			
<i>Yes</i>	78 (66%)	77 (67%)	84 (67%)
<i>No</i>	41 (34%)	38 (33%)	42 (33%)
Total	119	115	126
Listing approach			
<i>INN name</i>	58 (49%)	44 (38%)	64 (51%)
<i>Brand names</i>	49 (41%)	60 (52%)	59 (47%)
<i>Mixed Listing</i>	12 (10%)	11 (10%)	3 (2%)
Total	119	115	126
Listed Brands			
<i>Both</i>	36 (59%)	21 (30%)	25 (40%)
<i>R-BMP Only</i>	11 (18%)	48 (68%)	4 (7%)
<i>BSPs Only</i>	14 (23%)	2 (3%)	33 (53%)
Total	61	71	62
Preferred Type			
<i>R-BMP</i>	10 (16%)	52 (73%)	29 (47%)
<i>BSPs</i>	30 (49%)	4 (6%)	7 (11%)
<i>Unclear</i>	21 (34%)	15 (21%)	26 (42%)
Total	61	71	62
Specified Brand of Choice			
<i>Yes</i>	13 (21%)	4 (6%)	9 (15%)
<i>No</i>	48 (79%)	67 (94%)	53 (85%)
Total	61	71	62
Special Population Considerations³			
<i>Yes</i>	3 (5%)	8 (11%)	10 (16%)
<i>No</i>	58 (95%)	63 (89%)	52 (84%)
Total	61	71	62
Special Indication Considerations			
<i>Yes</i>	9 (15%)	7 (10%)	0 (0%)
<i>No</i>	52 (85%)	64 (90%)	62 (100%)
Total	61	71	62

BSP: Biosimilar medicinal product; **INN:** International non-proprietary name (molecular name); **R-BMP:** Reference biological medicinal product

³ Factors related to patient population or indication that might affect prescriber brand/product of choice.

List of Declarations:

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest.

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