

## **FACT SHEET:**

21 June 2004

### **Ankylosing Spondylitis**

#### **What is Ankylosing Spondylitis?**

- Ankylosing spondylitis is a chronic, inflammatory rheumatic disease which affects the joints, particularly the sacroiliac joints and the lumbar joints at the base of the spine.<sup>1</sup>

#### **What causes ankylosing spondylitis?**

- Tumour necrosis factor  $\alpha$  (TNF $\alpha$ ) is over expressed in the joints (particularly sacroiliac) of patients with ankylosing spondylitis.<sup>2</sup>
- There is a strong genetic component for ankylosing spondylitis with most sufferers having both the HLA-B27 gene (or subtypes) and an interaction with bacteria which seems to be crucial for development of the disease.<sup>1,2</sup>

#### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms may include any of the following:<sup>3</sup>

- Chronic back pain
- Lack of mobility and stiffness in the back (particularly in the morning)
- Pain in other joints including the neck, knees, ankles and hips
- Pain around tendons and in the heel
- Inflammation of the eyes
- Rashes

#### **Who does it affect?**

- The disease affects young people, often beginning between the ages of 15 and 30 years, with an average age of onset at 24 years.<sup>1</sup>

- The disease affects both sexes, but may progress more slowly in women.<sup>2</sup>
- Ankylosing spondylitis affects at least 1 in 200 adults, or approximately 0.5% of the adult population.<sup>1</sup>

## Treatment options for ankylosing spondylitis

- Remicade is one of a new class of anti-rheumatic drugs that target TNF $\alpha$  which causes chronic inflammatory diseases.
- For patients with severe ankylosing spondylitis, Remicade reduces the activity of the disease and improves the patient's functioning capacity and quality of life.<sup>2</sup>
- Specifically, Remicade reduces disease signs and symptoms including fatigue, pain in the joints and morning stiffness.<sup>2</sup>
- Studies have shown that more than 50% of patients on treatment had a 50% improvement in their disease activity within 12 weeks after the first Remicade treatment.<sup>2</sup>
- Prior to the introduction of Remicade, common treatments for ankylosing spondylitis have mostly included non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and physiotherapy.<sup>2</sup>
- Methotrexate and sulfasalazine have shown little effectiveness for this disease. Systemic corticosteroids have been shown to work only in selected patients. For those with severe pain, phenylbutazone or opioids have been shown to be effective.<sup>2</sup>

**PBS Information (Rheumatoid Arthritis):** Restricted Benefit. Treatment of adults with severe active rheumatoid arthritis. Refer to PBS or [www.hic.gov.au/providers/forms/pbs/mp/infliximab.htm](http://www.hic.gov.au/providers/forms/pbs/mp/infliximab.htm) for full restricted benefit information.

**PBS Information (Ankylosing Spondylitis):** This product is to be listed on the PBS for the treatment of Ankylosing Spondylitis from 1 August 2004. Refer to PBS or [www.hic.gov.au](http://www.hic.gov.au)

### INDICATIONS

In Australia, Remicade is approved by the TGA for the treatment of:

- Rheumatoid Arthritis in adults (02/01/02)
- Ankylosing Spondylitis (21/07/03)
- Crohn's Disease (23/06/00)

### References

1. Khan, M A. (2002) *Ankylosing Spondylitis. The facts*. Oxford University Press.
2. Braun J, Brandt J, Listing J, Zink A, Alten R, Golder W, Gromnica-Ihle E, Kellner H, Krause A, Schneider M, Sorensen H, Zeidler H, Thriene W and Sieper J. (2002) Treatment of active ankylosing spondylitis with infliximab: a randomised controlled multicentre trial. *The Lancet*; 359:9313; 1187-1193.
3. Arthritis Victoria 2002. Ankylosing Spondylitis, accessed 07/05/04. [www.arthritisvic.org.au/Arthritis/ankylosing.pdf](http://www.arthritisvic.org.au/Arthritis/ankylosing.pdf)