Selective activation of regulatory T cells (Tregs) by BT-061: Clinical data from a completed Phase IIa trial in rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and design of a multi-centre, double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled, Phase IIb dose-finding trial

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Disclosure

This study was designed and sponsored by Biotest AG.

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Selective activation of regulatory T cells (Tregs) by BT-061: Clinical data from a completed Phase Ia trial in rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and design of a multi-centre, double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled, Phase IIb dose-finding trial

Abstract

Background

Tregs are essential for maintaining normal immune homeostasis. In patients with autoimmune diseases reduced numbers or functional impairment of Tregs has been observed. BT-061, a humanized agonistic monoclonal antibody, binds to a unique epitope of CD4, induces Treg-specific signalling events and leads to their functional activation. Pre-clinical data using isolated Tregs and RA synovial fluid indicate that BT-061 leads to suppression of CD4 and CD8 T effector cell proliferation, reduction of the expression of pro-inflammatory cytokines, and increase in the production of the anti-inflammatory cytokine TGF-beta. BT-061 is currently under clinical investigation in rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis.

Method

A Phase Ia trial in 96 RA patients non-responsive to DMMARDs evaluated doses of 1.25 mg to 100 mg BT-061 SC and 0.5 mg to 25 mg BT-061 IV versus placebo.

Results

The trial demonstrated that the best response was achieved with 50 mg BT-061 SC as monotherapy. This dose of BT-061 resulted in ACR20/50/70 responses of 67%/37%/17%, versus 14%/14%/0% in patients in the placebo group after 6 weeks of therapy. Rapid improvements in tender (TJC) and swollen (SJC) joint counts were observed (TJC: mean reduction of 56.4% at Week 7, SJC: mean reduction of 62.5% at Week 7). Therapy with BT-061 was generally well tolerated.

Conclusion

Based on these results, a placebo-controlled, Phase Ib trial, involving approximately 35 clinical centres across Europe has been initiated to evaluate clinical use of BT-061 in combination with methotrexate (MTX) in RA patients with an inadequate response to MTX. Placebo or 25, 50 or 75 mg of BT-061 SC will be given once-weekly, for 12 weeks. Initially 100 patients (25 per group) will be enrolled. After an interim analysis to identify the best dose of BT-061, an additional 76 patients will be randomized to this dose of BT-061 or placebo (38 per arm). The primary endpoint will be ACR20 response at weeks 13, with secondary endpoints including ACR50 and ACR70 responses. Safety and efficacy of BT-061 will be monitored over the entire course of the trial.

Backgound

Tregs mediate and balance the immune system. Once activated, they suppress T cells in an antigen-independent manner (Figure 3A). In patients with autoimmune diseases, reduced numbers or functional impairment of Tregs results in loss of this finely-tuned mechanism.

Methods

- **Biotest**: Study 96 was a randomised, placebo-controlled, Phase Ia trial
- **96 patients with RA who had a history of DMARD failure**
- **BT-061 SC (1.25–100 mg) or IV (0.5–25 mg) per group for matching placebo (n=2 per group) weekly for 6 weeks**
- **Primary end point: ACR 20 response after 6 weeks of treatment**
- **Secondary endpoints include ACR 50/70, DAS28 and EULAR criteria, safety, cytokine assessment, lymphocyte phenotyping**

Results

The most efficient route of administration for BT-061 was found to be SC. Based on ACR responses (Figure 2) and improvements in tender (TJC) and swollen (SJC) joint counts, the most efficacious dose of BT-061 was identified to be 50 mg.

At the 50 mg dose, BT-061 induced rapid improvements in TJC and SJC, which in some cases was maintained beyond the closing period (Figure 3).

Conclusion

- **This is the first study of a CD4 antibody given via the SC route for the treatment of RA**
- **In this trial, in patients with a history of DMARD failure, clinical effects of BT-061 given as monotherapy indicated 50 mg SC as the likely optimal dose**
- **Induced activation of Tregs with BT-061 is a promising therapeutic strategy for the management of RA**

Study 979: Phase IIb Dose-Finding Study

Based on these findings a Phase IIb trial, Biotest Study 979, has been initiated (Figure 4).

Safety

No depletion of CD4 cells was observed at any dose level. BT-061 was generally well tolerated; serious AEs were reported in 2 patients of 72 treated with BT-061 (both received 6.25 mg SC), and in 1 of 24 patients who received placebo (the patient was in the IV group). There were no serious infections and no deaths reported in the study.

Study Design

- **Enrolment into Study 979 commenced in December 2010** (Co-ordinating investigator, Gianfranco Ferraccioli, Rome).
- **Anti-TNF therapy** has been initiated (Figure 4).

Table 1: Adverse events (SC doses)

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<th>Dose (mg)</th>
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<th>12.5 mg</th>
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**Disclosure**

The study was designed and sponsored by Biotest AG.

**Reference**