

Roche Pharma launches Vabysmo to treat vision impairment

Experts estimate the drug to cost about ₹400,000 in India for the first year of treatment, and ₹200,000 for subsequent years due to lesser dosage requirements



India, with a third of the global blind population, has 11 million people suffering from retinal vision loss, with around four million cases of nAMD and DME. (File Photo: HT)

New Delhi: Roche Pharma India, a subsidiary of Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche, has launched Vabysmo (faricimab) in the Indian market. This monoclonal antibody drug targets two significant causes of vision loss among the elderly and diabetic patients.

In a statement on Tuesday, the company said that Vabysmo was the first bispecific monoclonal antibody specifically tailored for ocular use, effectively targeting two pathways involved in the development of neovascular or "wet" age-related macular degeneration (nAMD) and diabetic macular edema (DME), both leading causes of vision impairment globally.

Approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in January 2022, Vabysmo is available in over 90 countries, with doses administered at over 2 million.

While the company has not disclosed pricing details, experts estimate the drug to cost about ₹400,000 in India for the first year of treatment, and ₹200,000 for subsequent years due to lesser dosage requirements. In the US, it is listed at \$2,190, subject to insurance coverage variations.

"...(R)etinal conditions are often diagnosed late or neglected, leading to vision loss," said V Simpson Emmanuel, chief executive and managing director, Roche Pharma India. "With fewer eye injections over time, while also improving and maintaining vision and anatomy, Vabysmo offers a more convenient and effective treatment schedule for patients, their caregivers and healthcare systems."

The launch of Vabysmo marks the company's entry into ophthalmology in India.

Unlike existing treatments that only target the VEGF pathway, Vabysmo's dual-targeting molecule offers a novel mechanism of action (MoA) that has been absent in nAMD treatment for over 15 years and nearly a decade in DME treatment. This dual inhibition stabilizes the retina's blood vessels, leading to improved vision outcomes, the company said.

AMD affects the central part of the retina, essential for activities requiring sharp vision, such as reading. It is the primary cause of vision loss in individuals over 60, affecting around 20 million people worldwide.

DME, if untreated, can lead to blindness and significantly reduce the quality of life. A Lancet study in India highlighted that the country, with a third of the global blind population, has 11 million people suffering from retinal vision loss, with around four million cases of nAMD and DME.

The increasing prevalence of diabetes, affecting over 100 million Indians, and an aging population, underscore the urgency of addressing diabetic retinopathy and DME, along with nAMD.

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