

Novartis set to launch chronic myeloid leukemia drug in India

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The company's plans are underway for the launch of the treatment in the country before the end of the current month.

NEW DELHI : Novartis India, the local arm of Swiss pharma giant Novartis AG, is in discussions to secure a distribution partner for the imminent launch of Asciminib, the first-in-class treatment for chronic myeloid leukemia (CML) targeting the ABL myristoyl pocket (STAMP), Amitabh Dube, the company's country president and managing director, said. "Innovative therapies introduced over the past two decades have revolutionized treatment for people with CML, a serious and life-threatening blood disorder. Novartis, known for developing targeted therapies for CML, is now launching Asciminib, the first CML treatment that works by specifically targeting the ABL Myristoyl pocket," Dube told Mint in an email interaction.

The company aims to launch the treatment in India before the end of the month, although specific details regarding partnership for the brand remain undisclosed. "We are preparing for the launch of Asciminib in India by this month. However, it is premature to comment on any partnerships for the brand in India," he added.

Chronic myeloid leukemia, also known as chronic myelogenous leukemia, is a type of cancer that starts in certain blood-forming cells of the bone marrow. Annually, CML incidence in India is estimated at 0.8 to 2.2 per 100,000 population, lower than in the western nations. In leukemia, the most common type is CML in India, accounting for 30% to 60% of all leukemia.

The drug is slated to be manufactured at Novartis' overseas manufacturing facilities and will be imported into India. The company, with its Sandoz business spin-off last year, lacks any manufacturing presence within the country. So, it intends to promote the drug through a partnership with an Indian pharmaceutical company possessing extensive distribution channels.

"We are constantly seeking opportunities to partner with key stakeholders like the government, insurance companies, and healthcare providers; to find sustainable access strategies based on value-based reimbursement and evidence-based decision to ensure that advanced therapies can improve health outcomes of people in India," said Dube.

The company did not disclose details about the price of the drug in India. Asciminib is the first tyrosine kinase inhibitor (TKI) to target the ABL1 myristoyl pocket. TKIs are frequently effective in treating CML for prolonged periods. Some approved medicines are Dasatinib (Bristol-Myers Squibb), Nilotinib (Novartis), Bosutinib (Pfizer), and Imatinib (Novartis).

According to Insights10, a healthcare-focused market research firm, India's chronic myelogenous leukemia therapeutics market was valued at \$0.28 billion in 2022, and is projected to reach \$0.59 billion by 2030, at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.8%.

The company's oncology portfolio in the country includes treatment for advanced HR+ Her2-ve (metastatic or advanced) breast cancer, chronic myeloid leukemia, lung cancer, melanoma, thyroid cancer, and gliomas.

In February, Novartis AG had said it would conduct a strategic review of Novartis India Ltd, including its 70.68% stake in the company that's listed on the BSE.

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