

## Medical Update Memo

January 20, 2006

### Status of rituximab in multiple sclerosis

Recent media reports have suggested that an agent called rituximab (Rituxan<sup>®</sup>, by Genentech) may be an effective therapy for multiple sclerosis. Rituximab is currently being studied in a multi-centre Phase II/III trial involving primary-progressive MS, and a Phase II trial in secondary-progressive MS, and results from these studies are not yet available. Although there was a case report recently published (Stuve et al, *Arch Neurol.* 2005; 62:1620-1623) about one person who did well after receiving this agent, there is insufficient data to determine whether this agent is safe and effective for treating multiple sclerosis. We are awaiting the results of larger, controlled trials that are currently under way.

**About Rituximab:** This agent, which is given as an infusion into the vein, binds to a molecule (CD20) on the surface of B cells and depletes them from the circulation. B cells are immune cells that make antibodies and may play a role in the immune attack on brain and spinal cord tissues in multiple sclerosis. Rituximab is approved for treating some forms of cancer, and is under testing for several autoimmune diseases including lupus erythematosus, rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis. Beyond the larger-scale studies, the National MS Society (USA) is currently supporting a small clinical trial of rituximab by Dr. Anne H. Cross at Washington University in St. Louis. This trial involves individuals with relapsing-remitting MS, and is still ongoing.

- Adapted from information from the National MS Society (USA)

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