

What can we do to improve the lives of people living with inflammatory bowel diseases?

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Covid-19 reminds us of the importance of empathy by putting ourselves in the shoes of healthcare workers, people impacted with this pandemic, as well as those living with chronic conditions. Patient organizations play a vital role in supporting patient communities, especially during these challenging times and I'm grateful for all their work. One of these patient organizations, EFCCA (European Federation of Crohn's and Ulcerative Colitis Associations) coordinates World IBD Day every year on May 19th. Millions of people worldwide unite to raise awareness about Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, also known as inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD), which affects 10 million people worldwide.

IBD impacting patients' lives

Imagine losing your job because you cannot manage your symptoms outside the comfort of your home; being unable to have a day out with friends and family without constantly worrying about where the closest toilets are; or experiencing severe fatigue that even a short five minute walk to the park feels like a marathon.

These are just a few of the experiences of people living with IBD, which can be hugely uncomfortable and regularly interfere with daily life, especially because of its relapsing and remitting nature. Not only do people living with IBD suffer from severe abdominal pain, diarrhea and fever, but many patients also experience fatigue, depression and anxiety. As IBD most commonly occurs at a young age between 15-30 years, it forces those severely affected to postpone or even give up on their studies or work, placing enormous personal and economic stresses on them and their families.

Given these complexities associated with IBD, it's important for patients to receive the right treatment, at the right time to not only help manage symptoms but also improve their quality of life. However, the rising incidence, young age of onset and incurable nature mean that treatment of IBD has significant cost implications, both on the patient and healthcare systems.

This day gives us an opportunity to ask ourselves: What can we do to improve the lives of the people living with IBD? This year's theme is "Make IBD work", and we know that a better understanding of this condition and a supportive workplace can help many people living with this condition. This is why, today we are organizing a webinar for Sandoz associates all over the world, to listen to an IBD patient and a medical expert to raise awareness about IBD. In the same time, Sandoz' purpose is pioneering access for patients, hence we work diligently to increase access to high quality, more affordable biologics – this is our commitment to patients, caregivers and healthcare systems.

Biosimilars offer a promising future for IBD patients and healthcare systems

IBD is not curable, but in many cases it can be managed with the right treatment. One of the exciting developments in this area, has undoubtedly been the introduction of biologics, which have revolutionized the treatment of IBD since 1999.

As initial biologic therapies near the end of their patents after nearly 20 years, biosimilars are becoming increasingly common for the treatment of IBD, particularly in Europe, helping to reduce healthcare costs while providing high quality, effective treatment options that IBD patients need.

Evidence from over 10 years in several countries, combined with an increasing number of real-world studies have consistently demonstrated the significant benefits of biosimilars for patients and progressively changed the point of view of IBD focused physicians. Results from two surveys conducted by the European Crohn's and Colitis Organization (ECCO) – the first in 2013, when the first biosimilar was approved and the second in 2015, suggest an increase in physician confidence regarding the use of biosimilars (from 35% to 85%). Furthermore, healthcare practitioners are becoming increasingly comfortable in supporting the process of switching patients from reference biologics to biosimilars based on the increasing wealth of positive patient experiences and reassuring safety and efficacy data.

And it's not just healthcare practitioners – an increasing number of professional societies in countries, such as Switzerland, Belgium and Canada have been acknowledging the vast evidence that is available and supporting the use of biosimilars in IBD. This trend is helping ensure IBD patients have equal or even improved access to safe and effective biologic therapies, and helping health systems support a biologic market that is more accessible, affordable and sustainable.

We have made great strides, but more still needs to be done

On this year's World IBD day, as we celebrate the huge strides that have been made to help patients improve access to potentially life-changing medicines, let's not forget that we must not stop here. Much more can be done to increase patient access to these vital biologic treatments and this can only be achieved if everyone, from healthcare professionals to payors, come together to realize the full potential of biosimilars. The safety of switching to biosimilars – under the guidance of a physician - is a key solution to support a sustainable healthcare system and help improve lives of millions of patients who are braving this debilitating and sometimes life-threatening condition.

#WorldIBDDay #makeIBDwork #IBD #Biosimilars #Healthcare#

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