Credit: S. Harris/Springer Nature Limited

MARKET WATCH

Top product forecasts for 2019

Perhaps the most startling thing about the forecasted best-selling drugs in 2019 is the longevity of some of the entrants in the list (TABLE 1). Humira, once again expected to be the industry's biggest drug — outselling nearest rival Revlimid by almost a factor of two — was launched in 2003. And thanks to AbbVie's extensive defence of Humira's patents, it is unlikely any product will best the arthritis drug before US biosimilars emerge in 2023.

Like Humira, a number of monoclonal antibody (mAb) products in this list are living in the shadow of US biosimilars, either in the form of approvals or a pick-up in biosimilar sales. So far, biosimilars in the US have not had the same impact on originator sales as they have had in parts of Europe; however, the political and social pressure to reduce US drug prices will at some point result in increased uptake.

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The key question for those companies with mature mAb products is when and how deep the hit to sales from US biosimilars will be. Currently Roche, with three mAbs in the top ten this year, potentially stands to lose the most. The combined sales of Avastin, Herceptin and Rituxan were US$21.4 billion in 2017, 54% of the company's total sales that year.

Biosimilar versions of all three drugs have already been approved in the US and more are set to follow. However, none have launched owing to either legal and/or reimbursement issues or marketing agreements with Roche. But if and when they do, Roche could feel a significant impact.

Celgene, the owner of Revlimid, has also been busy defending the patent life of its biggest product. But there are questions over whether Celgene, now set to be part of Bristol-Myers Squibb, will be able to hold off generic competition for the multiple myeloma drug before its patents expire around 2023.

Of the newer products in the list, PD1-blocking cancer immunotherapies feature prominently, with Keytruda outpacing Opdivo following a string of clinical and regulatory successes ahead of its rival. Some analysts are predicting that Opdivo could fall even further behind in the coming years given Keytruda's unassailable lead in first-line lung cancer.

As for the others in the top ten, Stelara's first-mover advantage has so far kept it ahead in what is now a very crowded interleukin inhibitor market for psoriasis, but it is forecast to be overtaken by Novartis's Cosentyx in 2024, according to Evaluate Pharma. In contrast, both Prevnar 13 and Eliquis could advance up this list in coming years, as the Pfizer pneumococcal vaccine is expected to have sales exceeding $6 billion in 2024, while blood-thinner Eliquis is forecast to add sales owing to potential label extensions.

Table 1 | **Top product forecasts for 2019**

Rank	Product	Company	Pharmacological class	2019 worldwide sales (US$ millions)
1	Humira	AbbVie	Anti-TNF mAb	19,604
2	Revlimid	Celgene	Immunomodulator	10,918
3	Keytruda	Merck & Co.	Anti-PD1 mAb	9,801
4	Eliquis	Bristol-Myers Squibb	Factor Xa inhibitor	7,666
5	Opdivo	Bristol-Myers Squibb	Anti-PD1 mAb	7,341
6	Avastin	Roche	Anti-VEGF mAb	6,151
7	Stelara	Johnson & Johnson	Anti-IL-12/IL-23 mAb	5,874
8	Prevnar 13	Pfizer	Pneumococcal vaccine	5,806
9	Herceptin	Roche	Anti-HER2 mAb	5,599
10	Rituxan	Roche	Anti-CD20 mAb	5,358

HER2, human epidermal growth factor receptor 2; IL, interleukin; mAb, monoclonal antibody; TNF, tumour necrosis factor; VEGF, vascular endothelial growth factor. Source: EvaluatePharma, January 2019.

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Competing interests
The author declares no competing interests.