

Top product forecasts for 2021

The day is coming when Humira (adalimumab) will no longer dominate the biggest-selling drug charts, but not next year. AbbVie's powerhouse again tops sales forecasts, with nearly US\$20 billion in expected sales in 2021 (TABLE 1). To put Humira's recent dominance of the industry into context, from its launch in 2003 until the end of June 2020, the anti-TNF monoclonal antibody (mAb) generated \$165.8 billion in cumulative sales. So, this year, it has snatched the crown for the industry's most successful drug from Lipitor (atorvastatin), a cholesterol-lowering drug that racked up ~\$160 billion in full-year sales in 23 years on the market.

Humira has continued its impressive sales for autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis owing to AbbVie's twin strategy of price increases and strong defence of its patent estate to thwart the launch of any US-approved biosimilars, thereby offsetting erosion of sales due to the emergence of biosimilars in Europe. Humira is, however, entering its twilight years. The deals AbbVie struck with biosimilar makers to delay launches are set to end in 2023, when competition will finally start to erode US sales.

Although Humira still makes up almost 60% of AbbVie's sales, the small-molecule BTK inhibitor Imbruvica (ibrutinib) is

continuing to provide blockbuster revenues, earning it a joint ninth place sales spot in 2021. However, sales could slow if second-generation BTK inhibitors such as Merck and Co.'s MK-1026 successfully address resistance due to the C481S mutation in BTK. Regardless of the success of Imbruvica and newer drugs such as Rinvoq (upadacitinib) in rheumatoid arthritis and Skyrizi (risankizumab) in psoriasis though, it is unlikely they will come close to replacing the sales of Humira.

With Humira finally moving out of the spotlight, the next few years will be the time for Keytruda (pembrolizumab) to shine, with sales of Merck's checkpoint inhibitor for a range of cancers predicted to overtake those of Humira by 2024. For now, Keytruda is expected to hit sales of \$16.8 billion in 2021. Sales of the anti-PD1 mAb are also predicted to grow in coming years, owing to its dominance in first-line non-small-cell lung cancer and continued expansion into other tumour types. With approvals in new indications expected to grow, sales in 2026 could hit \$26.3 billion, setting it up to sell more than twice as much as any other drug that year. Meanwhile, the inability of Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS)'s Opdivo (nivolumab) to match this success has relegated it to the also-ran position in the anti-PD1/PDL1

mAb field, and sixth place in the sales rankings.

The checkpoint inhibitors are just two of four cancer drugs in the top ten, providing some justification for the industry's continued focus on oncology. With annual sales regularly exceeding \$10 billion, Revlimid (lenalidomide) maintains both its reputation as a cash cow and its third place in the rankings, but the immunomodulator is living on borrowed time; generics are expected in 2022. However, with more than \$35 billion in sales forecast until then, it remains a high-value income source for BMS.

In non-oncology therapeutic areas, as predicted last year, Gilead's HIV combination therapy Biktarvy (bictegravir, emtricitabine and tenofovir) has remained in the top ten list owing to its stellar launch and its ability to so far see off competition from GlaxoSmithKline's Dovato (dolutegravir and lamivudine).

The rivalry between blood thinners Eliquis (apixaban) and Xarelto (rivaroxaban) again features in the top ten list, and again Eliquis is the clear winner. The BMS/Pfizer product is expected to outsell Bayer and J&J's drug by almost \$3 billion next year, and a recent patent win should keep generics off the market until 2026, cementing Eliquis's position as BMS's second biggest growth driver behind Opdivo.

Although Eliquis might have dodged a patent bullet, both Eylea (aflibercept) and Stelara (ustekinumab) are expected to have sales declines from 2023 and 2024, respectively, following the market entry of biosimilars. While J&J is trying to protect Stelara's sales through indication extensions into Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, Eylea does not have that option. However, fears that Novartis's rival product for wet age-related macular degeneration, Beovu (brolicizumab), would take a chunk out of Eylea's sales before 2023 seem not to have materialized.

One remarkable achievement that has materialized from the industry's focus on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 is a portfolio of effective vaccines. Nevertheless, these are not expected to make the top ten list in 2021. Among the leading vaccines, Pfizer/BioNTech's BNT162b2 and Moderna's mRNA-1273 are forecasted to have 2021 sales of \$2.5 billion and \$2.0 billion, respectively.

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Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Table 1 | Top product forecasts for 2021

Rank	Product	Company	Pharmacological class	2021 worldwide sales (US\$ millions)
1	Humira	AbbVie/Eisai*	Anti-TNF mAb	19,963
2	Keytruda	Merck & Co.	Anti-PD1 mAb	16,825
3	Revlimid	Bristol-Myers Squibb/BeiGene	Immunomodulator	12,710
4	Eliquis	Bristol-Myers Squibb/Pfizer	Factor Xa inhibitor	10,546
5	Eylea	Regeneron Pharmaceuticals/ Bayer/Santen Pharmaceutical*	Anti-VEGF mAb	8,872
6	Opdivo	Bristol-Myers Squibb/Ono Pharmaceutical	Anti-PD1 mAb	8,759
7	Stelara	Johnson & Johnson/Mitsubishi Chemical*	Anti-IL-12/IL-23 mAb	8,445
8	Biktarvy	Gilead Sciences	HIV INSTI/NRTI/ NtRTI	8,418
=9	Imbruvica	AbbVie/Johnson & Johnson	BTK inhibitor	7,607
=9	Xarelto	Bayer/Johnson & Johnson	Factor Xa inhibitor	7,605

*Indicates sales attributed to the company contribute less than US\$1 billion to the product forecast. BTK, Bruton tyrosine kinase; INSTI, integrase strand transfer inhibitor; mAb, monoclonal antibody; NRTI, nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor; NtRTI, nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitor; TNF, tumour necrosis factor; VEGF, vascular endothelial growth factor. Source: EvaluatePharma, December 2020.