MARKET WATCH

Top product forecasts for 2022

What a difference 12 months makes. Last year's forecast for the top 10 drugs of 2021 did not even include two of the year's eventual biggest sellers, the COVID-19 vaccines Comirnaty (tozinameran; Pfizer/BioNTech) and Spikevax (Moderna). The omission of two of the fastest-selling drugs in the pharmaceutical industry's history was largely down to their emergency use authorizations (EUAs) in December 2020 and uncertainty around manufacturing capacity to deliver promised doses, making forecasting sales difficult.

However, both products feature firmly in the 2022 numbers (TABLE 1), with some financial analysts expecting both Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna to potentially sell even more vaccines than current guidance. These heightened expectations are fuelled by use in lower age groups, the potential need for a fourth dose and the ramping up of manufacturing capacity. People scrambling to get initial or booster shots in the face of the Omicron variant could also increase sales. Nevertheless, this could be a short-term sales bonanza, with sales forecast to swiftly fall as the pandemic becomes endemic.

The demise of vaccine sales will, however, come too late for the once-unassailable Humira (adalimumab), which has been relegated to second place in 2022's rankings. This monoclonal antibody (mAb) drug for rheumatoid arthritis had been expected to stay on top of the bestseller list until its US patent expiry in 2023. While Humira might no longer occupy the top sales spot, the AbbVie drug will retain the title of the best-selling product in pharma's history.

The rise of Keytruda (pembrolizumab) up the ranking has also been affected by the COVID-19 vaccines. Merck & Co.'s anti-PD1 mAb has played second fiddle to Humira in sales for the last few years and has now been pushed down to joint third place. Before the pandemic, Keytruda had been expected to overtake Humira at the top in 2024. The checkpoint inhibitor has, however, continued its impressive expansion into new indications and treatment lines. Keytruda is now used in close to 40 indications and recent approvals, including as an adjuvant therapy in renal cell cancers, should help Keytruda achieve its US$19.5 billion sales forecast in 2022.

Keytruda's regulatory success has only served to further widen the gap between it and rival checkpoint inhibitor Opdivo (nivolumab). Bristol Myers Squibb's anti-PD1 mAb is predicted to notch up less than half of Keytruda's sales in 2022. However, recent success in stomach cancers might help bolster future sales.

Table 1 | **Top product forecasts for 2022**

Rank	Product	Company	Pharmacological class	2022 worldwide sales (US$ millions)
1	Comirnaty	Pfizer/BioNTech	SARS-CoV-2 vaccine	29,000
2	Humira	AbbVie/Eisai	Anti-TNF mAb	21,158
3	Spikevax	Moderna	SARS-CoV-2 vaccine	19,500
3	Keytruda	Merck & Co.	Anti-PD1 mAb	19,496
5	Eliquis	Bristol Myers Squibb/Pfizer	Factor Xa inhibitor	11,918
6	Revlimid	Bristol Myers Squibb/BeiGene*	Immunomodulator	11,253
7	Stelara	Johnson & Johnson/ Mitsubishi Chemical*	Anti-IL-12/IL-23 mAb	10,065
8	Biktarvy	Gilead Sciences	HIV INSTI/NRTI/ NtRTI	9,747
9	Opdivo	Bristol Myers Squibb	Anti-PD1 mAb	8,888
10	Dupixent	Sanofi/Regeneron	Anti-IL-4/IL-13 mAb	7,421

*Indicates sales attributed to the company contribute less than US$1 billion to the product forecast. INSTI, integrase strand transfer inhibitor; mAb, monoclonal antibody; NRTI, nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor; NtRTI, nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitor; PD1, programmed cell death protein 1; SARS-CoV-2; severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2; TNF, tumour necrosis factor. Source: EvaluatePharma and company statements, December 2021.

On the surface, Bristol Myers Squibb appears not to be doing too badly, with two other drugs in the top 10 list. However, one of these is facing imminent competition. Four generic companies now have approval to sell their versions of oncology drug Revlimid (lenalidomide) after March 2022. Revlimid sales are expected to drop to just $2.06 billion in 2026. If not for a patent win in 2020, the anticoagulant treatment Eliquis (apixaban) might have been encountering the same sales erosion as Revlimid, but sales of Bristol Myers Squibb's biggest product, and Pfizer's third biggest, are now protected until at least 2026.

However, competition could see psoriasis treatment Stelara (ustekinumab) drop out of this analysis from 2024. The anti-IL-12/IL-23 mAb's $9-billion-plus sales make it an attractive target and multiple biosimilar companies are lining up to get approval ahead of a key 2023 patent expiry; Korea's Celltrion is currently leading the race with a phase III product.

In contrast, both Biktarvy (bictegravir, emtricitabine and tenofovir) and Dupixent (dupilumab) should maintain their places in the top 10 for the next few years, thanks to their long patents and strong forecast sales. Biktarvy is expected to continue to dominate HIV treatment with its daily oral triplet combination therapy, while atopic dermatitis drug Dupixent is forecast to overtake Biktarvy and become the second biggest product by sales in 2026, behind Keytruda.

But the pandemic has taught us that products can become blockbusters in under a year. Two treatments that might fit this bill are the oral antivirals for COVID-19 developed by Merck/Ridgeback and Pfizer. Merck has already announced a contract with the US government for 3.1 million courses of Lagevrio (molnupiravir) worth $2.2 billion and Pfizer has inked a similar $5.29 billion deal for 10 million courses of Paxlovid (PF-07321332 and ritonavir). As with the COVID-19 vaccines in 2020, forecasting revenues beyond these US government contracts is almost impossible and will come down to both companies securing EUAs and being able to meet the demands of international buyers. But if the scramble for vaccines was anything to go by, the two could easily make 2022's top 10.

Lisa Urquhart
Evaluate Vantage, London, UK.
e-mail: lisau@epvantage.com

https://doi.org/10.1038/d41573-021-00211-7

Competing interests
The author declares no competing interests.