

Attack against Big Pharma, Novartis and Roche (°)

Luigi Rossini

Pharmacologist

Formerly Director of the Clinical Pharmacology-toxicology Service of
UPM-Ancona Azienda Ospedaliera, Ancona, Italy

Secretary of the WHO-ITA National collaborative pharmaco-toxicovigilance centre

Letter To The Editor,

The media are full of reports of the problems, legal and otherwise, currently involving at least two members of big pharma. Novartis is facing problems for Lucentis R (active principle ranibizumab) and Roche (Genentech) for Avastin (bevacizumab, off-label), not to mention the original role of Pfizer with reference to Macugen R (pegaptanil) and the recent role of Bayer (Regeneron Pharmaceuticals) for Eylea (aflibertcept). These biosimilars (WHO ATC Index, S01LA04) – either specific or selective - are also (indeed especially) used as anti-angiogenic vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) isoforms to treat the neovascular (exudative) form of age-related macular degeneration (ARMD). Napoleone Ferrara received the 2010 Lasker - DeBakey award for breakthroughs in angiogenesis research.

The publication of the document of the meeting of the Italian Competition and Market Protection Authority of February 27, 2014 was followed by exhaustive contributions by various specialists. Nonetheless the underlying issue does not seem to be kept consistently to the fore: the effectiveness, completeness and efficacy of current pharmaco-toxicovigilance and monitoring programmes exploring the side effects (including the adverse effects) of drug products remains an open problem. Yet this would be the most appropriate basis on which to found a comprehensive and innovative pharmaceutical as well as pharmacotoxicological and human clinical classification (Cf, *Farmacovigilanza internazionale*, Memorie Accademia marchigiana Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Ancona, Istituto Europeo, Memorie/Atti 38, 211-256, 2005; *Global recurrent classifications in experimental and clinical pharmacotoxicology*, Pharmacologyonline Newsletter 3, 12-15, 2012, clearly including this product class).

It should be kept in mind that Italy and five other countries have founded the WHO network and Data Bank of standardized pharmaco-toxicovigilance data - currently involving 141 centres from 137 countries. The task was assigned by the Health Ministry to the WHO-ITA National collaborative pharmaco-toxicovigilance centre (Clinica Medica, dir. Prof. Carlo De Martinis, and pharmacotoxicology laboratories, Service of clinical pharmacology and toxicology, both within Ancona university now UPM). However, the hefty funds allocated by the Health Ministry study centre, which would have enabled the continuation of our voluntary work, were never delivered; neither did we receive the sums promised by Regione Marche. At the same time, the sole pharmacologist and full Professor of Pharmacology in Ancona University and the Regional Hospital failed to be assigned to the hospital (later hospital-university) ethics board as envisaged by legal regulations.

These committees were involved in the planning and verification of relevant clinical and pharmacotoxicological experimental studies, a task that critically involves the pharmaco-toxicovigilance of products in various development stages as well as the approved and off-label use of products already on the market.

At the 19th National Meeting of the Italian Society of Pharmacology and associated national scientific societies (2nd Portonovo Conference on Biomathematics and 5th annual meeting of the representatives of the WHO-ITA National collaborative pharmaco-toxicovigilance system, Cf, Ancona, 25-28.9 1978 and 5-7.10 1982 - Cf, *World Health Organization PHA/83.2, 1-20, 1982*) the proposal had already been advanced that the database collecting events, adverse reactions and syndromes as well as lack of effectiveness related to approved and off-label use of drugs in the various stages of experimentation, including the clinical trial stage, should be structured on the basis of verifications conducted according to transparent and uniform protocols that were also to include average drug dosage (e.g. daily doses, DDD) corresponding to those of therapy compliance). If such proposals have not yet been implemented, it is to be feared that their current revamping will fail, too.

(°) Sent to *Corriere Adriatico*, Ancona, March 10, 2014.