

Cypress Charitable Trust
Room 1506-07, 15/F
Comweb Plaza, No 12, Cheung Yue Street
Cheung Sha Wan, Kowloon, Hong Kong

12 July 2023

Drug Formulary Committee
The Hospital Authority
(By Email)

Honourable Members of HA Drug Formulary Committee

I am writing to express my grave concern about the current classification of **Venetoclax** as a “Self-financed item Without Safety Net” in your latest Hospital Authority [Drug Formulary](#) (v19.1 – w.e.f. 8 Jul 2023).

As global haematology and haematological oncology specialists may become more and more aware every day, Venetoclax has become an important drug for people affected by chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) who may need multiple active treatments during relapses sooner or later in their life. Venetoclax-based therapy has been shown to significantly improve prognosis and progression-free survival, which can prolong the lives of CLL patients.

CLL is a slow-developing and a common type of blood cancer with higher incidence in adults aged over 50. It is traditionally incurable, but the emergence of Venetoclax transformed the treatment landscape massively related to tough CLL. In particular, historically, those with unmutated IgHV have had a worse prognosis. However, that may no longer be true in this new era of targeted therapies led by Venetoclax. According to [CLL society](#), a recent study shows that those unmutated IgHV responded better to the combination of ibrutinib + venetoclax than patients with mutated IgHV and were more likely to achieve uMRD in the peripheral blood and bone marrow.

Despite the clear benefits of Venetoclax, it is currently classified as a Self-financed item without Safety Net. Although it is available for purchase at HA pharmacies, patients must pay for the full cost of the treatment themselves. This places a significant financial burden on patients and their families, and may

deprive those CLL hopefuls of accessing this life-saving and proven effective first-line CLL treatment in time.

I wish DFC could revisit emergent scientific evidences and consider urgent repositioning of **Venetoclax**. This would ensure that patients have access to any Venetoclax-based treatment option, while also providing a safety net for those who may face financial difficulties.

For the past couple of years, the benefits of Venetoclax are supported by numerous research studies, which have consistently shown improved prognosis, progression-free survival and overall survival for CLL patients. This treatment option has the potential to significantly improve the quality of life for CLL patients and help them live with CLL healthier despite a blood cancer type by name.

By repositioning Venetoclax as a “Self-financed item With a Safety Net”, DFC can ensure that CLL patients have access to this life-saving treatment option. Public money not only benefits patients and their families, but also bring broader social benefits, including reduced long-term healthcare costs and improved social productivity.

Given piles of scientific evidence in support of Venetoclax as an effective breakthrough for CLL, as a local tiny CLL charity worker and a recovering CLL patient myself having benefited from Venetoclax, I vehemently ask DFC to take a major step for the community of CLL patients, and **consider a fast-track repositioning of Venetoclax as a Self-financed item With Safety Net in HA Drug Formulary as soon as possible** and to ensure that the least fortunate immunocompromised community of CLL patients and HA specialists have access to this drug for the benefits of the Hong Kong society.

I do look forward to hearing your kind update if I could share your discussed roadmap regarding this drug.

Sincerely,

Mike Cheung
Director and Trustee
Cypress Charitable Trust (Tax-Exempt Charity: 91/18591)
Encl.

References

1. Research published in National Library of Medicine run by US government

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7389877/>

2. Venetoclax Combo Improves progression-free survival in CLL

<https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/975652>

3. Dr. John Allan on Outcomes for Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL) Patients with Undetectable Measurable Residual Disease (MRD) After Treatment with Ibrutinib Plus Venetoclax

<https://cllsociety.org/2023/03/ash-2022-dr-john-allan-on-outcomes-for-chronic-lymphocytic-leukemia-cll-patients-with-undetectable-measurable-residual-disease-mrd-after-treatment-with-ibrutinib-plus-venetoclax/>

