

## Interferon Beta 1-a (Initiation Package)

### Product:

INTERFERON BETA-1A (Rebif®)  
8.8mcg & 22mcg Initiation Package

**Class of drugs:** Immunomodulator

### Indication:

Treatment of multiple sclerosis

**Manufacturer:** Serono Canada Inc.

### CED Recommendation

The Committee recommended that interferon beta-1a (Rebif) Initiation Package not be funded through Ontario Public Drug Programs, on the basis that other formats of this drug are already funded and the requested price premium for the Initiation Package is not justified.

### Executive Officer Decision

Based on the CED's recommendation, the Executive Officer decided not to fund interferon beta-1a (Rebif) Initiation Package.

### Status

No funding through the Ontario Public Drug Programs.

### Highlights of Recommendation:

- ◆ Interferon beta 1-a is an injectable drug used in the treatment multiple sclerosis (MS). The 22mcg and 44mcg pre-filled syringes of interferon beta 1-a are currently funded through the Exceptional Access Program. The Initiation Package is a new format developed to be used only during the first four weeks of treatment.
- ◆ The usual recommended dose of interferon beta-1a is 44mcg three times per week, administered by subcutaneous injection. The dose can be decreased to 22mcg three times weekly for patients who cannot tolerate the higher dose. When patients start treatment, smaller doses are usually given to reduce the risk of side effects. Prior to the availability of the Initiation Package, patients use a spacer device on the 22mcg or the 44mcg pre-filled syringes to obtain a smaller dosage of the medication. The Initiation Package contains smaller dosages and may theoretically be more convenient for new patients.
- ◆ The Initiation Package costs \$1380 or \$7.47 per mcg of the drug. On a per mcg basis, this is more than twice as expensive as the existing 44mcg pre-filled syringe.
- ◆ **Overall, the Committee acknowledged the potential convenience of the Initiation Package but noted that the price premium is not justified.**

### Background:

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disabling disease that affects the brain and spinal cord. The disease attacks myelin, an insulating material that protects critical portions of nerve cells. MS often destroys myelin in patches, causing swelling and interfering with the usual flow of signals along nerve fibres.

The effects of MS vary greatly from one person to another, depending on the way in which the disease strikes the nervous system. Symptoms include blurry vision, difficulties speaking, faulty short-term memory, bowel or bladder problems, extreme fatigue, loss of balance or coordination, muscle stiffness, and even partial or complete paralysis. Not all people with MS experience the same symptoms. In the relapsing-remitting form of MS, attacks are followed by complete or partial recovery.

While there is no cure, some approved drugs appear to alter the course of the disease. Several treatments are based on interferon, a protein that is part of the immune response to foreign agents. Another treatment, glatiramer acetate, consists of some of the same biochemical building blocks found in myelin.

Interferon beta-1a Initiation Package contains 8.8mcg and 22mcg pre-filled syringes to be used during only the first four weeks of treatment.

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### Detailed Discussion:

No additional details. The full CED discussion is as outlined in the *Highlights of Recommendation* section.

### CEDAC Recommendation:

(<http://www.cadth.ca/index.php/en/cdr/recommendations>)

The Canadian Expert Drug Advisory Committee (CEDAC) did not review this product.



Ministry of  
**Health and Long-Term Care**  
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