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Prescribing trends for targeted therapies in rheumatoid arthritis among rheumatologists in Southern California, 2008–2010

Practicing rheumatologists have a choice of 9 biologic therapies that may be appropriate in the management of rheumatoid arthritis (RA), including the 3 new agents introduced since 2008. Rx Biotech is a prescription service that specializes in supplying patients and practitioners with products for the treatment of rheumatic diseases. It has been used on at least one occasion by almost all rheumatologists in private practice in Southern California. These specialists' specific choices of biologic interventions, as the proportions of all newly initiated treatments, were examined for the years 2008–2010 and are shown in Table 1.

Among 231 rheumatologists utilizing the services of Rx

Table 1. New prescriptions for biologic agents written by rheumatologists for RA patients*

	2008	2009	2010	2-year change
Anti-TNF	93.6	95.1	92.6	–1.0
Infliximab	9.2	12.1	10.7	1.5
Adalimumab	41.5	42.1	35.7	–5.8
Etanercept	42.9	28.4	29.3	–13.6
Certolizumab	–	4.2	8.3	8.3
Golimumab	–	8.4	8.5	8.5
Rituximab	3.2	2.3	2.5	–0.7
Abatacept	2.6	2.3	3.6	1.0
Tocilizumab	–	–	1.0	1.0
Anakinra	0.6	0.3	0.3	–0.3
New biologic prescriptions, no.	927	1,783	2,206	–
Prescribing rheumatologists, no.	143	182	231	–
New prescriptions initiated, mean per physician	6.5	9.8	9.5	–

* Except where indicated otherwise, values are the percentages of treatments prescribed for rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patients. Anti-TNF = anti-tumor necrosis factor.

Biotech, the 3 original anti-tumor necrosis factor (anti-TNF) agents (etanercept, adalimumab, and infliximab), as a proportion of all biologic agents dispensed, decreased modestly over the last 3 years (93.6% to 75.7% of newly initiated treatments), with etanercept demonstrating the largest decrease (13.6%). Two newer agents, golimumab and certolizumab, are equally prescribed and account for 1 in 6 newly initiated treatments. Non-anti-TNF agents (rituximab, anakinra, tocilizumab, abatacept) are prescribed for the first time to only 1 in 14 RA patients prescribed a new biologic therapy. These data demonstrate the persistent tendency to prescribe anti-TNF agents (92.6%) as the agent of choice for patients with RA seen by private practitioners in Southern California.

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