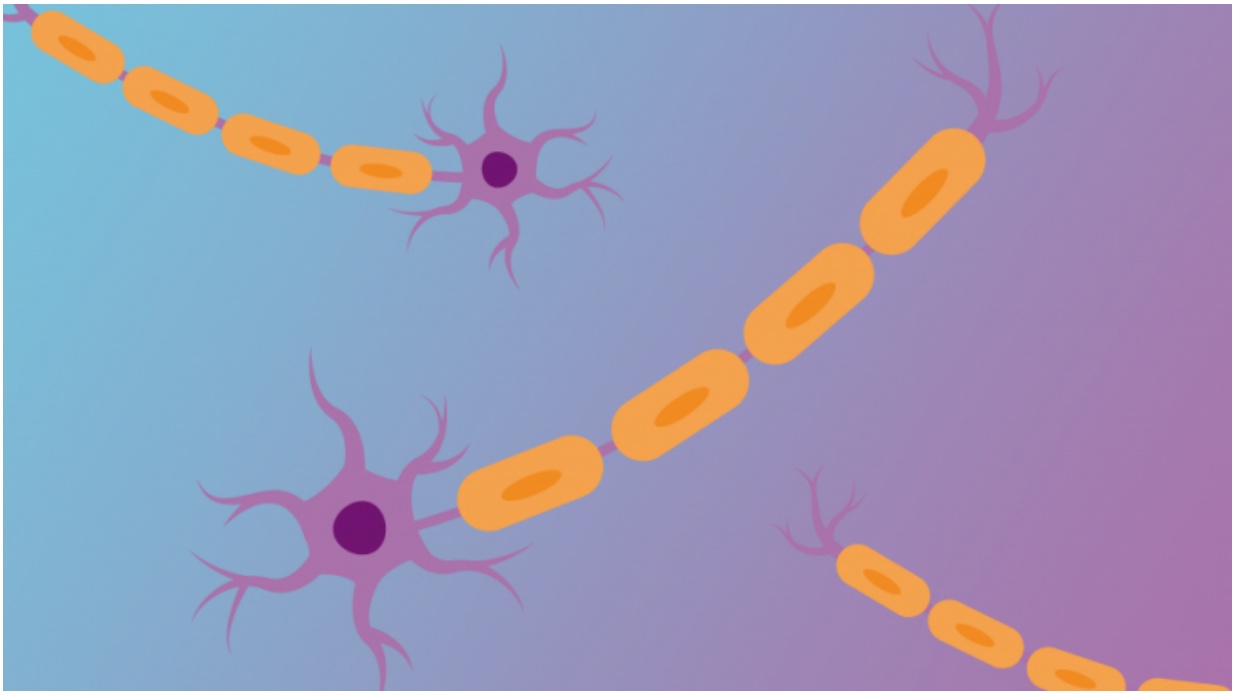
Genentech announces favorable results for MS drug ocrelizumab

October 9 2015, by Bob Yirka



Swiss pharmaceutical company Genentech a member of the Roche Group, has released (at the European Committee for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis meeting) findings from Phase III clinical trials for its multiple scleroses drug ocrelizumab, for use in relapsing forms of the disease or in cases of primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS)—and the results appear to be very promising.

MS is a debilitating disease that is usually progressive, people with the condition lose control over their muscles and experience pain—this occurs due to the breakdown of myelin, a whitish sheath that covers nerves, in an immune response gone wrong. In some limited cases, the disease resolves on its own or with the application of medicines—unfortunately approximately 85 percent of patients with the disease experience relapse, with each episode resulting in more loss of muscle control. Also, 10 to 15 percent of patients develop PPMS, where instead of relapsing, there is nearly constant deterioration. The new drug by Genetech is meant to treat both of these types of the disease.

In this latest test of the new drug, there were three trials involving 2,300 patients in all; two to test effectiveness in preventing relapse, and the third in slowing or stopping PPMS. In the announcement, Genentech reported the results of all three trials—in the first two, called OPERA I and OPERA II, the company reported that the drug cut relapse by nearly 50 percent (46 in one, 47 in the other) compared to the current leading treatment, Rebif (which reduces relapse rate by 30 percent). In the third trial, the drug cut disability (as measured by the time it took to walk a certain distance, volume of brain lesions and loss of brain volume) by more than a quarter, officials reported, in 12 and 24 week test runs.

Genentech has also claimed that side effects of the drug are much less than those caused by other drugs such as Tysabri and Lemtrade, making it as safe to use as Rebif, and that could mean earlier administration for patients and thus improving quality of life for the approximately 2.3 million people around the world who have it.

Roche has reported that it plans to seek approval of ocrelizumab early next year which could allow for marketing the drug as early as 2017. The drug, if approved, would be given to patients two times a year via intravenous drip.