

Biologics for asthma: Attacking the source of the disease, not the symptoms

November 5 2015

Imagine you suffer from severe asthma, and you've tried every treatment available, but nothing has worked. You still can't breathe. Then a new therapy comes along that attacks the source of the asthma, as opposed to the symptoms, and treats the disease at a cellular level. That's the promise of biologics, and the topic of four presentations at the 2015 ACAAI Annual Scientific Meeting in San Antonio, November 5-9.

"Biologics is definitely something that has piqued the interest of physicians, including allergists, throughout medicine," said Kevin Murphy, MD, ACAAI Fellow and presenter at the meeting. "Traditional asthma treatments don't work for some people, and their asthma is uncontrolled. Biologics is at the cutting edge of treatment because it has the potential to be personalized - to be formulated to treat those cells which are the mechanism, or pathway, that leads to allergic inflammation and makes it so hard for some people to breathe."

Omalizumab is currently the only biologic treatment for asthma that has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in the United States, but more are in the pipeline. Allergists hope that in the next few years there could be two or three more drugs approved. Omalizumab is safe for both adults, and children over the age of 12, for treatment of [severe asthma](#).

"It's an exciting time to be an allergist," said allergist Rohit Katial, MD, ACAAI Fellow and presenter at the meeting. "For many years, our primary tools for combatting severe asthma have been either

bronchodilators, known as quick-relief medicines, or long-term control medicines which are taken every day to prevent symptoms and attacks. We also use immunotherapy, allergy shots, to reduce the [allergic reactions](#) which cause asthma attacks. Biologics target the cells and pathways that cause the [allergic inflammation](#) that has been linked to asthma."

People with severe uncontrolled asthma being treated with biologics receive an IV or subcutaneous injection every two weeks or once a month. The amount of allergens in the system is decreased when the inflammatory cells are treated. They find they don't have as many [asthma attacks](#) and they can breathe better. As knowledge of the effects of biologics grows, as well as the ability to identify patients who will find them beneficial, the movement toward personalized treatment will follow.

More information: Presentations on Biologics at the ACAAI Meeting
Friday, November 6, 10:50 am – Precision Asthma Care: Phenotypes and Biologic Medications
Saturday, November 7, 8:30–10:30 am – Biologics in Practice: Unique Opportunity for Allergist Expertise
Saturday, November 7, 9:35 am – Adverse Reactions to Biologic Agents
Sunday, November 8, 5:05 pm – Biologic and Other New Therapies for Severe Asthma

Provided by American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

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