

## PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

### BIOLOGICS

#### What is a biologic?

Biologic therapies are medications that specifically target an aspect of the immune system. They include

- Anti-TNF agents - infliximab (Remicade® or Inflectra®), adalimumab (Humira®), golimumab (Simponi®)
- Anti-IL-12/23 agents – ustekinumab (Stelara®)
- Anti- $\alpha$ 4 $\beta$ 7 integrin – vedolizumab (Entyvio®)

#### When is a biologic used?

Biologics are used when the IBD cannot be controlled with other medications such as steroids, thiopurines (Imuran®), methotrexate; when the IBD is moderate to severe; when fistulas and perianal disease is a problem.

#### How are biologics given?

Some biologics are given through the Intravenous (IV) – infliximab, ustekinumab (1<sup>st</sup> dose), vedolizumab

Some biologics are given through the sub cutaneous (SC) injections – adalimumab, golimumab, ustekinumab

#### What are the side effects of biologics?

Potential side effects of biologics include reactions to the infusion or injection of the drug

- Minor side effects include short term flu-like symptoms after infusions or injections; localized injection site reactions (redness, rash, swelling, itching, or bruising) – these can be managed conservatively
- Severe reactions such as shortness of breath, face swelling, low blood pressure may mean an allergy to the drug, and thus the particular biologic may need to be stopped.
- If you have been exposed to tuberculosis in the past, the use of biologics may reactive this infection. To reduce the risk of this happening, prior to starting a biologic, you will need to have a Chest X-ray and skin test for TB, and if you have latent TB you will require treatment before starting a biologic.
- There is also a small risk of hepatitis B reactivating, and so prior to starting the biologics, you will need to have hepatitis blood work checked and hepatitis treated if you have chronic infection.

**Any signs of fever should be reported to your IBD health practitioner immediately, and medical attention sought for investigation and treatment of infection.**

#### Can I get cancer from biologics?

Like any drug that affects the immune system, there is a very remote risk of developing cancers, including lymphoma. Ask your IBD health practitioner to explain this.

### **Pre-Biologic Work up (Complete BEFORE can start a biologic)**

- Chest X-ray (to be done at local hospital or imaging labs)
- TB skin test (book 2 step Mantoux test at family doctor or public health unit)
- Hepatitis A, B, C, and HIV blood work (to be done at hospital or local lab)
- Stool test(s) to rule out infection (C. Diff)
- Stool test to measure inflammation (FCP)