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MEDIA RELEASE • COMMUNIQUE AUX MEDIAS • MEDIENMITTEILUNG

NICE issues preliminary recommendation for Glivec® in England and Wales as first-line drug therapy for patients with chronic myeloid leukemia

Basel, Switzerland, 18 June 2003 — The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has issued a preliminary recommendation that the Novartis drug Glivec® (imatinib)* should be used for first-line treatment of patients newly diagnosed with Philadelphia chromosome-positive (Ph+) chronic myeloid leukemia (CML) in the chronic phase. Glivec received a licence in the UK as part of the centralized EU license to treat newly diagnosed (Ph+) CML patients on 19 December 2002.

NICE was established on 1 April 1999 as a Special Health Authority for England and Wales. It is part of the National Health Service (NHS) and its role is to promote high clinical standards in the NHS by developing or commissioning guidance on clinical and cost-effectiveness and disseminating guidance to clinicians, patients and commissioners.

The final decision from the Institute is expected in July of this year. If the preliminary recommendation is confirmed, newly diagnosed chronic phase Ph+ CML patients in England and Wales will have access to Glivec treatment under the NHS as their first drug treatment option. Under current NICE guidance, Glivec is recommended for Ph+ CML patients in the blast crisis, accelerated phase or in chronic phase after failure or intolerance of interferon-alpha therapy. For people in chronic-phase CML currently receiving interferon-alpha (IFN) as first-line treatment, the choice of whether to change to Glivec should be based upon the response of the disease to current treatment and by the tolerance of the patient to IFN. This decision should be made after informed discussion between the patient and the responsible clinician.

Worldwide, CML has an incidence of one-to-two cases per 100 000 population per year and is responsible for 15 to 20% of all adult cases of leukemia. In England and Wales, approximately 2660 people have CML each year. The annual case rates are 1.0 per 100 000 men and 0.8 per 100 000 women, according to NICE.

About Glivec
Glivec is indicated for the treatment of newly diagnosed adult and pediatric patients with Ph+ CML in the EU, Switzerland, and a number of other markets. Glivec is approved in the U.S. for newly diagnosed adult patients with Ph+ chronic phase CML and pediatric patients with Ph+ chronic phase CML whose disease has recurred after stem cell transplant or who are resistant to interferon-alpha therapy. In addition, Glivec is already approved in over 80 countries for the treatment of adult patients with Ph+ CML in blast crisis, accelerated phase, or in chronic phase after failure of interferon-alpha therapy.

Glivec is also approved in the EU, U.S., and more than 45 other countries for the treatment of patients with Kit (CD 117)-positive unresectable (inoperable) and/or metastatic malignant GISTs.

*In the US: Gleevec™ (imatinib mesylate)

Contraindications and Adverse Events
In the first-line International Randomized Study of Interferon vs. STI-571 (IRIS), the safety profile with Glivec was similar to that of previous Phase II studies in other CML patients. The majority of patients treated with Glivec experienced adverse events at some time. Most events were of mild to moderate grade and treatment was discontinued for adverse events only in 2% of patients in chronic phase, 3% in accelerated phase and 5% in blast crisis. The most common side effects included nausea, superficial edema, muscle cramps, skin rash, vomiting, diarrhea, hemorrhage, fatigue, headache, joint pain, cough, dizziness, dyspepsia and dyspnea, as well as neutropenia and thrombocytopenia.

The most common undesirable effects experienced during Glivec treatment in GIST are: headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, dyspepsia, myalgia, muscle spasm and cramps, joint swelling, dermatitis, eczema, rash, edema, fluid retention, neutropenia, thrombocytopenia or anemia.

Glivec is contraindicated in patients with known hypersensitivity to imatinib or any of its excipients. Women of childbearing potential should be advised to avoid becoming pregnant while taking Glivec.

The foregoing release contains forward-looking statements that can be identified by terminology such as "preliminary recommendation," "should be used," "is expected", "if…will," or similar expressions, or by express or implied discussions regarding potential new indications for Glivec, or regarding potential future revenue from Glivec. Such forward-looking statements involve known and unknown risks, uncertainties and other factors that may cause actual results with Glivec to be materially different from any future results, performance or achievements expressed or implied by such statements. There can be no guarantee that Glivec will be approved for any additional indications in any market. Neither can there be any guarantee regarding revenues from Glivec. In particular, management's ability to ensure satisfaction of the health authorities' further requirements is not guaranteed and management's expectations regarding Glivec could be affected by, among other things, additional analysis of Glivec clinical data; new clinical data; unexpected clinical trial results; unexpected regulatory actions or delays or government regulation generally; the company's ability to obtain or maintain patent or other proprietary intellectual property protection; competition in general; increased government pricing pressures; and other risks and factors referred to in the Company's current Form 20-F on file with the US Securities and Exchange Commission. Should one or more of these risks or uncertainties materialize, or should underlying assumptions prove incorrect, actual results may vary materially from those anticipated, believed, estimated or expected.

Novartis AG (NYSE: NVS) is a world leader in pharmaceuticals and consumer health. In 2002, the Group's businesses achieved sales of USD 20.9 billion and a net income of USD 4.7 billion. The Group invested approximately USD 2.8 billion in R&D. Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis Group companies employ about 77 200 people and operate in over 140 countries around the world. For further information please consult http://www.novartis.com.

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Additional information on Novartis Oncology and Glivec can be found at www.novartisoncology.com or www.glivec.com. Additional media information can be found at www.novartisoncologyvpo.com.