



australasian society of clinical immunology and allergy

5 May 2020

Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health
Professor Brendan Murphy
Chief Medical Officer
Australian Government
Canberra, ACT, Australia

Dear Minister Hunt and Professor Murphy,

Re: Potential for immune blockers to benefit in the treatment of COVID-19

We write on behalf of the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA), the peak professional body for clinical immunology/allergy specialists in Australia and New Zealand.

We wish to raise your awareness regarding the potential for immune blockers to benefit in the treatment of COVID-19. In particular, there is rising international interest regarding the use of a group of drugs called Interleukin 6 (IL-6) blockers, which have not yet been picked up by the media. In preliminary studies these drugs seem to significantly reduce the ventilation rate and mortality for patients presenting with COVID-19. Therefore, we believe that securing supply for future use, should be a strategic goal of the Australian Government.

In the rush to identify drugs to treat COVID-19, the focus has been on specific anti-virals (e.g. Hydroxychloroquine and Kaletra). However, the major complications of COVID-19 are due to the inflammatory response mounted by the patient's immune system. Given the historically slow rate of developing successful anti-virals, we believe that the best therapeutic options to impact COVID-19 mortality will come from blocking the inflammatory response.

At the moment the most likely way of doing this successfully, is through blocking a molecule called IL-6, which is perhaps the best predictor of a poor outcome with COVID-19 (please refer to attached paper). There is also emerging evidence of the benefit of IL-6 blockers (please refer to attached studies from China and Italy (pre-publication), and the preliminary perspective from a large Italian study in the following link <https://www.aphp.fr/contenu/tocilizumab-improves-significantly-clinical-outcomes-patients-moderate-or-severe-covid-19>

We are cautiously optimistic about the potential of IL-6 blockers, Tocilizumab (Actemra - Roche) and Siltuximab (Sylvant - Janssen-Cilag). We have included specific provision for their usage in our ASCIA position statement on treating COVID-19, which has been released this week on the ASCIA website: <https://www.allergy.org.au/hp/papers/specific-treatments-for-covid-19>

It is important to note that the content of ASCIA resources is not influenced by any commercial organisations and ASCIA has not received any funding from the suppliers of IL-6 blockers.

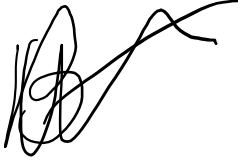
We believe that there is a rapidly closing window to secure supply of IL-6 blockers, before a large trial is reported out of Italy, which is likely to lead to increased demand and reduced drug access worldwide.

Based on the information in this letter and the attached papers, we request that the government rapidly investigates securing a supply of IL-6 blockers. We believe this may reduce the curve of serious cases

requiring ICU, which will provide a major positive benefit for Australia and countries that have an ongoing supply of these drugs.

We hope that our request is given due consideration and look forward to your response.

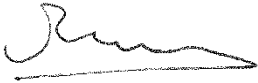
Yours sincerely,



Dr Brynn Wainstein
ASCIA President



Dr Theresa Cole
Chair, ASCIA Immunodeficiency committee
Chair, ASCIA COVID-19 working party



Dr Paul Gray
Deputy Chair, ASCIA COVID-19 working party

This letter is sent on behalf of the ASCIA COVID-19 Working Party members, who are listed on the ASCIA website:

<https://www.allergy.org.au/members/covid-19#cd8>