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Gastric cancer drug development shifting from small molecules to mABs

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While 99% of currently marketed gastric cancer drugs are small molecules, this dominance could give way to more innovative treatments in future, as the pipeline consists of 29% monoclonal antibodies (mAbs), according to business intelligence provider GBI Research.

The company's latest report states that there are currently 241 products in the gastric cancer pipeline, a number of which have different mechanisms of action and targets to the dominant marketed therapies.

Mr Firas Nour, Associate Analyst for GBI Research, says that while Herceptin and Cyramza are the only mAbs currently on the market for gastric cancer, mAbs have shown strong clinical results and advantageous properties in numerous oncology indications, meaning they account for a relatively large proportion of many oncology pipelines.

He says: "Data suggest that some biologics, such as mAbs, have more favorable risk profiles and, due to their higher target specificity, frequently perform more strongly in terms of both safety and efficacy than their synthetic counterparts. Moreover, the higher technological barrier for competitors to develop biosimilars can provide a further incentive.

"However, while the diversification of therapeutic molecule types for marketed and pipeline products has opened new clinical and commercial opportunities, this in itself is not a guarantee of future success, and investment in product development as well as manufacturing facilities is significantly higher."

GBI Research also states that the innovative gastric cancer pipeline will allow the treatment space to become more diverse and less reliant on highly cytotoxic chemotherapy regimens, providing hope for sufferers who currently face very low survival rates.

Mr Nour explains: "24% of gastric cancer products in active development are considered to be first-in-class, suggesting that the industry is pursuing novel approaches to treatment, and reducing the focus on established therapies.

"First-in-class development can be highly lucrative if clinically successful, but is also associated with high risks, as clinical efficacy is certainly not guaranteed. Therefore, it must be considered that although having a high proportion of first-in-class products is a promising indicator in a pipeline, there is substantial variation in these products regarding their clinical promise and potential market impact."