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Quality of Biotechnological Products:  
Stability Testing of Biotechnological/Biological Products**

**Step 5**

**NOTE FOR GUIDANCE ON QUALITY OF BIOTECHNOLOGICAL PRODUCTS:  
STABILITY TESTING OF BIOTECHNOLOGICAL/BIOLOGICAL PRODUCTS  
(CPMP/ICH/138/95)**

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**QUALITY OF BIOTECHNOLOGICAL PRODUCTS:  
STABILITY TESTING OF BIOTECHNOLOGICAL/BIOLOGICAL PRODUCTS**

Annex to the ICH Harmonised Tripartite Guideline for the Stability Testing of New Drug  
Substances and Products

**1. PREAMBLE**

The guidance stated in the ICH Harmonised Tripartite Guideline ‘Stability Testing of New Drug Substances and Products’ (27 October 1993) applies in general to biotechnological/biological products. However, biotechnological/biological products do have distinguishing characteristics to which consideration should be given in any well-defined testing program designed to confirm their stability during the intended storage period. For such products, in which the active components are typically proteins and/or polypeptides, maintenance of molecular conformation and, hence of biological activity, is dependent on noncovalent as well as covalent forces. The products are particularly sensitive to environmental factors such as temperature changes, oxidation, light, ionic content, and shear. In order to ensure maintenance of biological activity and to avoid degradation, stringent conditions for their storage are usually necessary.

The evaluation of stability may necessitate complex analytical methodologies. Assays for biological activity, where applicable, should be part of the pivotal stability studies. Appropriate physicochemical, biochemical and immunochemical methods for the analysis of the molecular entity and the quantitative detection of degradation products should also be part of the stability program whenever purity and molecular characteristics of the product permit use of these methodologies.

With the above concerns in mind, the applicant should develop the proper supporting stability data for a biotechnological/biological product and consider many external conditions which can affect the product's potency, purity and quality. Primary data to support a requested storage period for either drug substance or drug product should always be based on long-term, real-time, real-condition stability studies. Thus, the development of a proper long-term stability program becomes critical to the successful development of a commercial product. The purpose of this document is to give guidance to applicants regarding the type of stability studies that should be provided in support of marketing applications. It is understood that during the review and evaluation process, continuing updates of initial stability data may occur.

**2. SCOPE OF THE ANNEX**

The guidance stated in this annex applies to well-characterised proteins and polypeptides, their derivatives and products of which they are components, and which are isolated from tissues, body fluids, cell cultures, or produced using rDNA technology. Thus, the document covers the generation and submission of stability data for products such as cytokines (interferons, interleukins, colony-stimulating factors, tumour necrosis factors), erythropoietins, plasminogen activators, blood plasma factors, growth hormones and growth factors, insulins, monoclonal antibodies, and vaccines consisting of well-characterised proteins or polypeptides. In addition, the guidance outlined in the following sections may apply to other types of products, such as conventional vaccines, after consultation with the appropriate regulatory authorities. The document does not cover antibiotics, allergenic extracts, heparins, vitamins or whole blood.

### **3. TERMINOLOGY**

For the basic terms used in this annex the reader is referred to the "Glossary" in the ICH Harmonised Tripartite Guideline 'Stability Testing of New Drug Substances and Products' (27 October 1993). However, since manufacturers of biotechnological/biological products sometimes use traditional terminology, traditional terms are specified in parentheses to assist the reader. A supplemental glossary is also included that explains certain terms used in the production of biotechnological/biological products.

### **4. SELECTION OF BATCHES**

#### **4.1 Drug Substance (Bulk Material)**

Where bulk material is to be stored after manufacture but prior to formulation and final manufacturing, stability data should be provided on at least three batches for which manufacture and storage are representative of the manufacturing scale of production. A minimum of six months stability data at the time of submission should be submitted in cases where storage periods greater than six months are requested. For drug substances with storage periods of less than six months, the minimum amount of stability data in the initial submission should be determined on a case-by-case basis. Data from pilot-plant-scale batches of drug substance produced at a reduced scale of fermentation and purification may be provided at the time the dossier is submitted to the regulatory agencies with a commitment to place the first three manufacturing scale batches into the long-term stability program after approval.

The quality of the batches of drug substance placed into the stability program should be representative of the quality of the material used in pre-clinical and clinical studies and of the quality of the material to be made at manufacturing scale. In addition, the drug substance (bulk material) made at pilot-plant scale should be produced by a process and stored under conditions representative of that used for the manufacturing scale. The drug substance entered into the stability program should be stored in containers which properly represent the actual holding containers used during manufacture. Containers of reduced size may be acceptable for drug substance stability testing provided that they are constructed of the same material and use the same type of container/closure system that is intended to be used during manufacture.

#### **4.2 Intermediates**

During manufacture of biotechnological/biological products, the quality and control of certain intermediates may be critical to the production of the final product. In general, the manufacturer should identify intermediates and generate in-house data and process limits that assure their stability within the bounds of the developed process. While the use of pilot-plant-scale data is permissible, the manufacturer should establish the suitability of such data using the manufacturing-scale process.

#### **4.3 Drug Product (Final Container Product)**

Stability information should be provided on at least three batches of final container product representative of that which will be used at manufacturing scale. Where possible, batches of final container product included in stability testing should be derived from different batches of bulk material. A minimum of six months data at the time of submission should be submitted in cases where storage periods greater than six months are requested. For drug products with storage periods of less than six months, the minimum amount of stability data in the initial submission should be determined on a case-by-case basis. Product expiration dating will be based upon the actual data submitted in support of the application. Since dating is based upon the real-time/real-temperature data submitted for review, continuing updates of initial stability data should occur during the review and evaluation process. The quality of the final container

product placed on stability studies should be representative of the quality of the material used in the preclinical and clinical studies. Data from pilot-plant scale batches of drug product may be provided at the time the dossier is submitted to the regulatory agencies with a commitment to place the first three manufacturing scale batches into the long-term stability program after approval. Where pilot-plant scale batches were submitted to establish the dating for a product and, in the event that product produced at manufacturing scale does not meet those long-term stability specifications throughout the dating period or is not representative of the material used in pre-clinical and clinical studies, the applicant should notify the appropriate regulatory authorities to determine a suitable course of action.

#### **4.4 Sample selection criteria**

Where one product is distributed in batches differing in fill volume (e.g., 1 milliliter (ml), 2 ml, or 10 ml), unitage (e.g., 10 units, 20 units, or 50 units), or mass (e.g., 1 milligram (mg), 2 mg, or 5 mg) samples to be entered into the stability program may be selected on the basis of a matrix system and/or by bracketing.

Matrixing, i.e., the statistical design of a stability study in which different fractions of samples are tested at different sampling points, should only be applied when appropriate documentation is provided that confirms that the stability of the samples tested represents the stability of all samples. The differences in the samples for the same drug product should be identified as, for example, covering different batches, different strengths, different sizes of the same closure and possibly, in some cases, different container/closure systems. Matrixing should not be applied to samples with differences that may affect stability, such as different strengths and different containers/closures, where it cannot be confirmed that the products respond similarly under storage conditions.

Where the same strength and exact container/closure system is used for three or more fill contents, the manufacturer may elect to place only the smallest and largest container size into the stability program, i.e., bracketing. The design of a protocol that incorporates bracketing assumes that the stability of the intermediate condition samples are represented by those at the extremes. In certain cases, data may be needed to demonstrate that all samples are properly represented by data collected for the extremes.

### **5. STABILITY-INDICATING PROFILE**

On the whole, there is no single stability-indicating assay or parameter that profiles the stability characteristics of a biotechnological/biological product. Consequently, the manufacturer should propose a stability-indicating profile that provides assurance that changes in the identity, purity and potency of the product will be detected.

At the time of submission, applicants should have validated the methods that comprise the stability-indicating profile and the data should be available for review. The determination of which tests should be included will be product-specific. The items emphasised in the following subsections are not intended to be all-inclusive, but represent product characteristics that should typically be documented to adequately demonstrate product stability.

## 5.1 Protocol

The dossier accompanying the application for marketing authorisation should include a detailed protocol for the assessment of the stability of both drug substance and drug product in support of the proposed storage conditions and expiration dating periods. The protocol should include all necessary information which demonstrates the stability of the biotechnological/biological product throughout the proposed expiration dating period including, for example, well-defined specifications and test intervals. The statistical methods that should be used are described in the Tripartite Guideline on stability.

## 5.2 Potency

When the intended use of a product is linked to a definable and measurable biological activity, testing for potency should be part of the stability studies. For the purpose of stability testing of the products described in this guideline, potency is the specific ability or capacity of a product to achieve its intended effect. It is based on the measurement of some attribute of the product and is determined by a suitable quantitative method. In general, potencies of biotechnological/biological products tested by different laboratories can be compared in a meaningful way only if expressed in relation to that of an appropriate reference material. For that purpose, a reference material calibrated directly or indirectly against the corresponding national or international reference material should be included in the assay.

Potency studies should be performed at appropriate intervals as defined in the stability protocol and the results should be reported in units of biological activity calibrated, whenever possible, against nationally or internationally recognised standard. Where no national or international standards exists, the assay results may be reported in in-house derived units using a characterised reference material.

In some biotechnological/biological products, potency is dependent upon the conjugation of the active ingredient(s) to a second moiety or binding to an adjuvant. Dissociation of the active ingredient(s) from the carrier used in conjugates or adjuvants should be examined in real-time/real-temperature studies (including conditions encountered during shipment). The assessment of the stability of such products may be difficult since, in some cases, in vitro tests for biological activity and physicochemical characterisation are impractical or provide inaccurate results. Appropriate strategies (e.g., testing the product prior to conjugation/binding, assessing the release of the active compound from the second moiety, in vivo assays) or the use of an appropriate surrogate test should be considered to overcome the inadequacies of in vitro testing.

## 5.3 Purity and Molecular Characterisation

For the purpose of stability testing of the products described in this guideline, purity is a relative term. Due to the effect of glycosylation, deamidation, or other heterogeneities, the absolute purity of a biotechnological/biological product is extremely difficult to determine. Thus, the purity of a biotechnological/biological product should be typically assessed by more than one method and the purity value derived is method-dependent. For the purpose of stability testing, tests for purity should focus on methods for determination of degradation products.

The degree of purity, as well as individual and total amounts of degradation products of the biotechnological/biological product entered into the stability studies, should be reported and documented whenever possible. Limits of acceptable degradation should be derived from the analytical profiles of batches of the drug substance and drug product used in the pre-clinical and clinical studies.

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