

Date: 29/07/2025
Our Ref: 10285
Enquiries to loth.freedomofinformation@nhs.scot

Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION – RHEUMATOLOGY

I write in response to your request for information in relation to rheumatology treatment in NHS Lothian.

Question:

I wish to know what options for combination therapy are available in rheumatology for inflammatory arthritis. Specifically, I wish to know what options are available for combining multiple biologic (e.g. monoclonal antibodies) and/or small molecule (e.g. JAK inhibitors) treatments of inflammatory arthritis. I am NOT interested in what combinations options are available for methotrexate, leflunomide, or sulfasalazine. I would like to know what the process is for approving biologic and/or small molecule combination therapies, novel or otherwise.

Answer:

In general, medicines will go through formulary governance for approval of use, whereby specialists submit evidence of the medicine's clinical effectiveness, cost effectiveness and comparative safety that is then evaluated by a committee for use in the defined group of patients within the specific health board. Where medicines are used in combination this information may be part of the evidence of their effectiveness to be given.

Where specialists consider there to be a need for individualised treatment with medicines not included on the formulary, based on a rare patient case, there is a non-formulary procedure that allows this treatment to be approved. This process for approval includes providing documentation of previously used therapies, reasoning for why the standardised medicines cannot be used for the individual patient, then, similar to a formulary application a description of the clinical effectiveness, comparative safety, resource implications and cost considerations. This is peer assessed and agreed with the suitable clinical director for the service providing patient care.

NHS Lothian treat a small number of Adult Rheumatology patients with dual biologic therapy, but not for the sole indication of inflammatory arthritis. These patients are treated across multiple specialties (for example Gastroenterology and Rheumatology) for two indications.

The governance process in place to consider requests for dual biologic therapy for Adult Rheumatology patients in NHS Lothian is as follows:

- Clinician (usually the Rheumatology Consultant) submits biologics referral form to request Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) discussion, which includes doctors, pharmacists and nurses within the rheumatology team;
- Multi Disciplinary Team meeting occurs on a weekly basis to consider requests;
- Multi Disciplinary Team discusses evidence base, patient-specific factors, costs, outcome measures etc for each treatment request;
- Outcome of Multi Disciplinary Team discussion is communicated to the referring clinician, and the patient is either started on treatment or alternatives considered

We do not have a list of treatment combinations available across specialties. This would be discussed with each individual patient on a case-by-case basis.

I hope the information provided helps with your request.

If you are unhappy with our response to your request, you do have the right to request us to review it. Your request should be made within 40 working days of receipt of this letter, and we will reply within 20 working days of receipt. If our decision is unchanged following a review and you remain dissatisfied with this, you then have the right to make a formal complaint to the Scottish Information Commissioner within 6 months of receipt of our review response. You can do this by using the Scottish Information Commissioner's Office online appeals service at <https://www.foi.scot/appeal>. If you remain dissatisfied with the Commissioner's response you then have the option to appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law.

If you require a review of our decision to be carried out, please write to the reviewer at the address at the top of this letter. The review will be undertaken by a Reviewer who was not involved in the original decision-making process.

FOI responses (subject to redaction of personal information) may appear on NHS Lothian's Freedom of Information website at: <https://org.nhsllothian.scot/FOI>

Yours sincerely

ALISON MACDONALD
Executive Director of Nursing Midwifery and AHPs
Cc: Chief Executive