Author's response to reviews

Title: DAS-28-based EULAR response and HAQ improvement in rheumatoid arthritis patients switching between TNF antagonists.

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Author's response to reviews:

To the editor

In order to meet the comments of the reviewers, we have introduced the following amendments:

REVIEWER NUMBER 1

The English has to be revised in certain parts. Etanercept is called ETA and ETAN in different places, an there are other such inconsistencies that need to be corrected.
"y" is used in place of "and" on page 6.
In some places "%" is used and in other "per cent" (which should be "percent" anyway)
The whole manuscript has been revised and corrected. ETAN and ETA inconsistency has been addressed
If someone did not switch their TNF inhibitor when was their disease activity measured? when was the switchers' activity measured? at last dose of previous TNF or at the first dose of the new TNF? The timeline in general is confusing and needs to be clarified
The information is now provided in methods.
Patients had been systematically evaluated at the initiation of the therapy and every three months thereafter. Patients switching between TNF antagonists or switching to rituximab were evaluated at starting the therapy and every 3 months thereafter.
REVIEWer NUMBER 2

1) It may be worth also presenting the cumulative improvement in HAQ from original baseline (pre 1st TNF-antagonist) to demonstrate change over time with successive biologic agents (similar to presentation of data following successive rituximab cycles)

A figure with the cumulative improvement in HAQ is included and data reported in results

2) Table 3 reports efficacy data following a 2nd anti-TNF in the context of type of failure to 1st anti-TNF - this table could possibly be incorporated within table 2

Merging these 2 tables would make table 2 difficult to follow and therefore, we have maintained the initial structure of tables

3) More concise summary of the published literature in the discussion and more on the authors’ interpretation of their own data would be interesting; how the authors would apply their and other study findings to clinical practice would be useful

4) The final, closing sentence is somewhat convoluted and fails to deliver a clear message - suggest revision

The following 2 paragraphs have been introduced to meet these comments:

Nevertheless, there was a vast majority of reports on the favourable efficacy of switching, yet information on the effect size was largely unreported.

In addition, response of these failing patients to rituximab, abatacept and tocilizumab is inferior to the response of the biologic naïve patients to these biologics. Proof showing that cycling between TNF antagonists has similar or superior efficacy than switching to the new biologics is largely missing. Evidences coming from others (48) and our study suggest that this may not be the case.

5) Ref. 12 has the incorrect authors inserted: should be "Finckh A, et al. B cell depletion may be more effective than switching to an alternative anti-tumor necrosis factor agent in rheumatoid arthritis patients with inadequate response to anti-tumor necrosis factor agents. Arthritis Rheumatism 2007 May;56(5):1417-23"

6) Ref. 25 has been published in manuscript form subsequent to the abstract with 2 articles from the REACT trial

Reference 12, 25 and 26 have been corrected

7) Table 2: add "n/\%" after good, moderate, no response to explain the figures next to them
Table 2 has been amended accordingly.

Please, note that all authors have read and agreed with the revised manuscript.

We are looking forward to hear from you. Sincerely,

Juan J Gomez-Reino