

New cancer drug from Shanta Biotechnics

Shanta Biotechnics Ltd. of Hyderabad, India, has launched the first indigenously produced human interferon alpha under the brand name of Shanferon.

Interferons are primarily used to treat a range of cancers, chronic hepatitis B, hepatitis C, hairy cell leukemia, AIDS-related Kaposi's sarcoma and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Shanferon is a yeast-derived human interferon alpha produced using recombinant DNA technology. It has high safety and tolerability. In clinical trials conducted in 13 centres involving 200 patients across the country, it showed an under 2 per cent dropout in therapy owing to minor side effects, compared with an international average of 15-18 per cent dropout owing to side effects. Use of yeast gives comparative advantages over *E. coli* used largely by other manufacturers. Shantha Biotechnics plans to market the product at a price much lower than that of the imported interferons. Pfizer, with whom Shanta has signed an agreement that gives the former the first right to refusal, has not yet revealed any marketing plans. The global market for the product is estimated around US\$1.8 billion. The current Indian market for interferon is estimated at Rs. 700 million. *Contact: Shanta Biotechnics Pvt. Ltd., Serene Chambers, 3rd Floor, Road 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500 034, India.* (The Hindu Business Line, 19 April 2002)