

Ludwig Kappos

## New aspects in the treatment of multiple sclerosis with interferon beta-1b

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### Introduction

In the decade since the first approval of interferon beta-1b (Betaferon®) for relapsing-remitting (RR) multiple sclerosis (MS), considerable progress has been made in understanding the pathological mechanisms underlying MS and developing strategies to maximise the efficacy of existing therapies. The papers presented in this supplement represent much of the current thinking in the field of MS, as presented at a 1-day meeting in Vienna in March 2002. The purpose of the meeting, entitled *New Aspects in the Treatment of Multiple Sclerosis with Betaferon®*, was to discuss the current status of MS research and treatment and highlight some of the existing challenges for future MS diagnosis and disease management.

The present thinking on the pathogenetic mechanisms responsible for tissue damage is outlined, as are

the latest developments in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) techniques. The development of new MRI techniques addresses the need for better, more clinically relevant outcome measures, and has already increased our understanding of MS pathology and improved diagnosis. In terms of treatment, the data suggesting that treating patients after the first clinical event (clinically isolated syndrome) can produce some benefit are reviewed, as are outstanding questions, such as the long-term effects of early treatment, and early high-dose frequent interferon beta therapy – questions that are to be addressed by the BENEFIT (Betaferon in Newly Emerging multiple sclerosis For Initial Treatment) study. Finally, the important role of neurorehabilitation and its effects on quality of life are discussed.

While there are still many unanswered questions in MS therapy, the progress to date gives cause for optimism that current basic research and clinical trials will provide greater benefits for patients in the future.

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