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Pfizer Signals Waning Interest In Biosimilars

by [Jessica Merrill](#)

Despite commercial success in biosimilars, Pfizer said it is more interested in investing in innovative therapeutics.

[Pfizer Inc.](#) appears to be deprioritizing investment in biosimilars despite some commercial success in the area with a portfolio of oncology drugs. The company is more interested in investing in innovative therapeutics, biopharmaceuticals group president Angela Hwang said during the company's second quarter sales and earnings call on 28 July.

"Since we've made this pivot to a pure play, sort of innovation focus in our pipeline, we are really now looking at that biosimilar portfolio vis-à-vis other investments in breakthrough therapies that we have to make," she said.

"We will continue to look for opportunities, but I would say, at this point, it's going to be more opportunistic and that we're really looking at our investments in our development programs to be competitive," she added.

A big biosimilar opportunity still lies ahead in 2023 with the anticipated launch of biosimilar versions of [AbbVie Inc.](#)'s Humira (adalimumab), including Pfizer's own version, Abrilada, which was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in 2019.

The business area has grown into a fast blockbuster-sized commercial opportunity for Pfizer since the launch of three new cancer biosimilars in 2020: Zirabev (bevacizumab-byzr), Ruxience (rituximab-pyyr) and Trazimera (trastuzumab-gyyp), biosimilars of [Roche Holding AG](#)'s Avastin, Rituxan and Herceptin, respectively. (Also see "[Pfizer's Biosimilar Strategy Might Be Working](#)" - Scrip, 28 Jan, 2020.)

Pfizer also markets the biosimilars Retacrit (epoetin) and Inflectra (infliximab-dyyb), biosimilars of [Amgen, Inc.](#)'s Neupogen and [Johnson & Johnson](#)'s Remicade, which got Pfizer off to a notably

challenging start in the field in 2016. A high-profile lawsuit Pfizer filed against J&J alleging anti-competitive tactics around contracting for Remicade to block biosimilar competition was recently dismissed after the two companies settled the litigation. (Also see "[Pfizer And J&J Settle Remicade Antitrust Litigation](#)" - Generics Bulletin, 22 Jul, 2021.)

Pfizer's persistence paid off. Biosimilars generated \$559m in the second quarter, representing growth of 93% over the year-ago period. For the first six months of the year, biosimilars generated \$1.09bn. It has become a solid business, ranking up there with some legacy brands like Xeljanz (tofacitinib) for rheumatoid arthritis.

The success of the franchise was strong enough that Pfizer held onto it when it spun off its established products business Upjohn into a new company with [Mylan Pharmaceuticals Inc.](#), called [Viatris Inc.](#), last year. The portfolio likely would have had too much overlap with Mylan's own biosimilar portfolio to pass muster with anti-competitive regulators in any event.

[Merck & Co., Inc.](#) recently completed a similar transaction, spinning out its established products business into a new company called Organon in June, and including its biosimilars business in the transaction. (Also see "[Organon Completes Spin-Out From Merck With Five Biosimilars](#)" - Generics Bulletin, 4 Jun, 2021.)

Pfizer's pipeline of biosimilars beyond Humira is not the buttress the big pharma needs to maintain the business long term, however. As the company cycles through an unprecedented year, when it expects to generate \$33.5bn from the sale of its COVID-19 vaccine, it likely has an eye on building out in mRNA, buying new innovative platform technologies and acquiring assets to bolster its base business. (Also see "[Pfizer On Boosters, Kids And Prospects For A Long-Term COVID-19 Business](#)" - Scrip, 28 Jul, 2021.)