

POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF AVASTIN® AND LUCENTIS® AND “OFF-LABEL” STATUS OF AVASTIN®

Avastin® was not initially developed to treat PDR. Based upon the results of clinical trials that demonstrated its safety and effectiveness, Avastin® was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States of America (USA) for the treatment of metastatic colorectal cancer. As a condition of approval, the manufacturer produced a “label” explaining the indications, risks, and benefits. The label explains that Avastin® works by blocking a substance known as VEGF. Blocking or inhibiting VEGF helps prevent further growth of the blood vessels that the cancer needs to continue growing.

Once a device or medication is approved by the FDA, physicians in the USA may use it “off-label” for other purposes if they are well-informed about the product, base its use on firm scientific method and sound medical evidence, and maintain records of its use and effects. Ophthalmologists are using Avastin® “off-label” to treat Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) and similar conditions since research indicates that VEGF is one of the causes for the growth of the abnormal vessels that cause these conditions. Some patients treated with Avastin® had less fluid and more normal-appearing maculas, and their vision improved. Avastin® is also used, therefore, to treat macular oedema, or swelling of the macula secondary to conditions other than AMD.

Recently, a medication similar in function and designed for intravitreal administration Lucentis®, was approved by the FDA in the USA for the treatment of AMD and is currently licensed in the United Kingdom (UK) for the treatment of AMD via intravitreal injections. Please note that Lucentis® was not initially developed to treat PDR nor Diabetic Macular Oedema.

The goal of treatment is to prevent further loss of vision. After the pupil is dilated and the eye is numbed with anaesthesia, the medication is injected into the vitreous, or jelly-like substance in the middle of the eye.