

HEALTH

February 2004. We first used Avastin as an injectable into the eye in 2005, and Lucentis was approved in 2006."

Avastin spread globally because it was affordable and it worked, he said. In the meantime, since Genentech would not do a trial for Avastin to be used for macular degeneration, the National Institutes of Health sponsored a trial to compare Lucentis and Avastin head-to-head. Results should be published either in late April or early May. "We are anxiously awaiting the results."

Doctors are being incentivized to use Lucentis, he said. Medicare reimburses physicians 6 percent of the sales price for the drug they use, and Genentech started a rebate program for high-volume Lucentis users.

"Although that amounts to being paid double and a good sum of money, up until now 60 percent of U.S. doctors use Avastin over Lucentis," he said. "That's really a credit to our profession that so many doctors are

by Regeneron.

Dr. Adrian Lavina, an investigator in Regeneron's VIEW 1 study, offers his patients the choice to use VEGF Trap Eye at his practice, Retina Care Specialists in Palm Beach Gardens.

"This drug is similar to Lucentis in that it represses VEGFs, but it has a higher affinity, he said. "It binds more tightly to VEGF molecules and another molecule, Placenta Growth Factor."

While Lucentis is given every four weeks for two years, longer periods of time can go between doses of VEGF Trap Eye, and even though Lavina's patient, Otto, said that the injection is painless, people don't like getting an injection in their eye.

For the VIEW 1 study, which started about a year and a half ago, after a loading dose of three monthly injections the patient gets a VEGF Trap Eye injection every two months, rather than once a month. Initial results were released in November 2010, and VEGF Trap Eye was found to be just as good

and VEGF Trap Eye bind to all five."

Now, Lavina is in the second year of the two-year study, where injections are given every three months, more if needed.

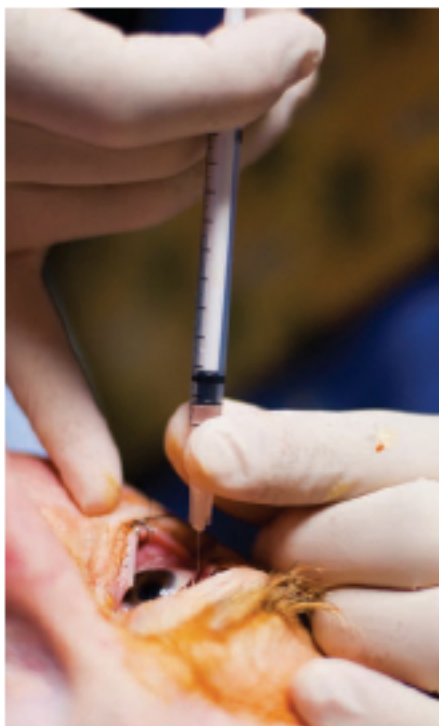
"It's very exciting to give the very best and to be able to offer medicines that are up and coming and might be better than what is currently available and we have a duty to move our field forward and be on the forefront of developing treatment," Lavina said.

Rosenfeld, too, finds the advancements in treating AMD exciting, and he agrees that less frequent dosing is

a real benefit, but he asks, what will VEGF Trap Eye cost?

That's a big question – Lavina said, because pricing would not be released until after FDA approval.

In the meantime, Rosenfeld is turning his attention to dry macular degeneration. An FDA-approved drug to block another disease (PNH or paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria), Alexion's Soliris is under trial in his Palm Beach Gardens and Miami offices. "It's already shown to be a safe drug, and we know the appropriate dosage and the dosing interval." ■



Dr. Adrian Lavina injects a VEGF Trap-Eye into a patient's eye to treat macular degeneration.

concerned with saving money."

Other countries – The United Kingdom, France, Germany, Germany, Austria, Norway and Brazil – are also conducting trials comparing the two drugs. "In early March this year, in the UK, NICE (National Institute for health and Clinical Excellence) decided that Lucentis would not be covered for diabetes (diabetic macular edema), and that's the first example of a national health organization saying, 'No, it's too expensive and we are not going to cover it,'" Rosenfeld said.

VEGF TRAP EYE

Meanwhile, other drugs are also in trials. One of them is VEGF Trap Eye

as giving Lucentis every single month after one year of the trial.

The results of a sister study, VIEW2, were released at the same time and mirrored the results of the VIEW1 study. Now is the right time to present the drug for FDA approval, Lavina said.

Lavina uses Lucentis and Avastin for patients who are not candidates or interested in taking part in a trial. He also uses Eyetech's Macugen, a company headquartered in Jupiter, in select cases – for high risk patients who've had a recent stroke, or patients already stable on Lucentis. "It's a niche market. It also binds VEGFs, but only one isoform of it. There are five active isoforms, and medicines like Lucentis,