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# How a Chronic GVHD Treatment Is Helping Patients Stay One Step Ahead

An oncology pharmacist shares how a treatment takes a different approach to treating chronic graft-versus-host disease (GVHD).

BY MELISSA DALY PUBLISHED: JAN 6, 2026

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A bone marrow or stem cell transplant can be life-saving for those diagnosed with some blood cancers, but many don't know that it can also cause other health issues that may last long after treatment ends. One of the more serious challenges is **graft-versus-host disease** (GVHD), a life-threatening complication in which the donor's immune cells recognize the patient's body as foreign and begin attacking it.

**Up to half of transplant patients develop the chronic form of GVHD**, in which this immune response persists or appears typically more than 100 days after transplant. Chronic GVHD may result in ongoing inflammation that can damage the skin, eyes, liver, lungs, and other organs, often leading to long-term complications that can severely impact a person's life, and for some, can be deadly.



COURTESY OF SUBJECT

Meet the expert: Brooke Adams, Pharm.D., BCOP, a board-certified oncology pharmacist based in Orlando. Dr. Adams is a healthcare professional who has been compensated by Incyte for her time and expertise contributing to this article.

Fortunately, there are several treatment options approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for chronic GVHD, giving patients and their care teams more reason for optimism. One of these is **Niktimvo™ (axatilimab-csfr)**, a prescription medicine used to treat adults and children weighing at least 40 kilograms with chronic GVHD after receiving at least two prior treatments and they did not work.

Managing chronic GVHD is a team effort. Among the most critical members of that team are oncology pharmacists, who work side-by-side with transplant specialists to help ensure each therapy is effective, accessible, and well-tolerated.

“Most importantly, we’re there to keep up with the latest information on all treatment options,” says **Brooke Adams, Pharm.D.**, BCOP, a board-certified oncology pharmacist in Orlando. “Oncology drugs are approved all the time, and I review them by looking closely at how they work, their efficacy and side effects, and whether they’re appropriate for any of our patients.”

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We spoke with Dr. Adams about what patients need to know about managing and treating chronic GVHD today, and how Niktimvo works differently from other treatment options available. Here’s what she had to say.

## How do healthcare providers decide on a treatment plan for chronic GVHD?

**Dr. Adams:** The severity of a patient’s GVHD symptoms is key. If they’re mild—such as a skin rash covering a small part of the body—we can try topical steroids, such as a cream or ointment. But if the symptoms are more moderate to severe, especially those affecting the lungs, muscle, and liver, we’ll need to address the GVHD more aggressively. In that case, the initial treatment is corticosteroid medications that suppress the immune system.

## When should patients consider talking to their doctor about other treatment options for chronic GVHD?

**Dr. Adams:** Patients should consider talking to their doctor about other treatment options if their symptoms aren’t improving or if the side effects from steroids are hard to manage. Steroids are usually the first treatment we try for chronic GVHD, but many patients don’t tolerate

them well. They can keep you awake at night. They may increase your anxiety, blood sugar, and blood pressure. They can thin your skin and make your bones weaker. We know that taking steroids long-term isn't ideal.

Further, **about 50% of patients who develop chronic GVHD do not respond to steroids**, requiring additional treatment options. So, if a patient isn't getting better in the first one to two weeks on steroids, we need to think about moving on to a different treatment. This is why it's vital to have multiple therapies approved to treat chronic GVHD.

## **When should patients and healthcare providers consider Niktimvo for chronic GVHD?**

**Dr. Adams:** If a patient continues to experience symptoms after taking more than one treatment (in addition to steroids), they should ask their doctor about Niktimvo. New or worsening symptoms may be a sign that chronic GVHD is progressing and, if left unaddressed, may lead to irreversible damage. This is why it's critical for patients living with chronic GVHD to monitor their symptoms and contact their doctor as soon as anything changes.

## **How is Niktimvo different from other chronic GVHD medications?**

**Dr. Adams:** Niktimvo is the first and only treatment to block the CSF-1 receptor in chronic GVHD. The CSF-1 receptor plays an important role in the development of inflammation and fibrosis, or scarring of tissue—two key contributors of chronic GVHD symptoms that can make it difficult for patients to move, breathe, or swallow food and medication.

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In a study of people experiencing chronic GVHD symptoms after taking at least two therapies, Niktimvo delivered fast and lasting responses for 75% of people. This means that 75% of people experienced improvement in at least one affected area without worsening signs of symptoms in another area. Additionally, about 60% of the people who showed a response to Niktimvo continued to respond for at least a year. What's also exciting is how quickly patients can respond to Niktimvo—as half saw a response in six weeks or less.

Niktimvo is also unique in that it's an IV (intravenous) therapy. Many of the other treatment options for chronic GVHD are oral medications, so a patient who's having difficulty swallowing may prefer this option. With Niktimvo, patients receive it via a 30-minute IV infusion every two weeks. It's an added plus for us as healthcare professionals, as it allows us to see our patients more frequently and monitor how well the treatment is working, too.

## **What should patients know about possible side effects for Niktimvo?**

**Dr. Adams:** As with any drug, it's important to understand potential side effects. Niktimvo is given through an IV, which means infusion-related reactions can occur and may be serious. Patients should tell their doctor right away if they experience symptoms such as fever, chills, rash, flushing, shortness of breath, trouble breathing, nausea, vomiting, or symptoms of high blood pressure such as chest pain, headaches, or

blurred vision during the infusion.

The most common side effects of Niktimvo include infections, increased blood level of liver enzymes, decreased blood level of phosphate, low red blood cell count (anemia), muscle, bone, or joint pain, increased blood level of pancreatic enzymes, low energy, increased blood level of calcium, increased blood level of a muscle enzyme, increased blood level of a bone enzyme, nausea, headache, diarrhea, cough, fever, and shortness of breath.

It's vital for people living with GVHD to stay in close communication with their care team and report any symptoms or changes so they can work to help manage side effects and adjust the treatment plan if needed. Every person's experience with chronic GVHD and treatment is different. Niktimvo may not be the right choice for everyone, and it's important that patients work closely with their healthcare team to find a treatment that is right for them.

## How can patients learn more about Niktimvo?

**Dr. Adams:** It's incredible to now have a treatment option to offer patients who need a different approach to managing their chronic GVHD. For people living with chronic GVHD, it can be reassuring to know there are additional treatment options available, especially if the first or second options aren't working.

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**Decisions about treatment should always be made between a patient and their care team. If chronic GVHD symptoms are impacting your daily routine, talk to your healthcare provider to see if Niktimvo may be right for you. Visit [Niktimvo.com](https://www.niktimvo.com) to learn more.**

#### IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

What are the possible side effects of Niktimvo™ (axatilimab-csfr) ?

Niktimvo may cause serious side effects, including:

Infusion-related reactions. Infusion-related reactions are common with Niktimvo and can be serious. Your healthcare provider will monitor you for infusion-related reactions during your treatment. If you have a reaction, your healthcare provider may temporarily or completely stop your treatment with Niktimvo. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have fever, chills, rash, flushing, shortness of breath, trouble breathing, nausea, vomiting, or symptoms of high blood pressure such as chest pain, headaches, or blurred vision during an infusion of Niktimvo.

The most common side effects of Niktimvo include:

- infections
- increased blood level of liver enzymes
- decreased blood level of phosphate
- low red blood cell count (anemia)
- muscle, bone, or joint pain
- increased blood level of pancreatic enzymes
- low energy
- increased blood level of calcium

- increased blood level of a muscle enzyme
- increased blood level of a bone enzyme
- nausea
- headache
- diarrhea
- cough
- fever
- shortness of breath

These are not all the possible side effects of Niktimvo. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

Before receiving Niktimvo, tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions, including if you:

- have or have had liver problems.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. Niktimvo may harm your unborn baby.

Females who are able to become pregnant:

- Your healthcare provider should do a pregnancy test before you start treatment with Niktimvo.
- You should use an effective method of birth control during your treatment and for 30 days after your last dose of Niktimvo. Talk to your healthcare provider about birth control methods that you can use during this time.
- Tell your healthcare provider right away if you become pregnant or think you may be pregnant during treatment with Niktimvo.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if Niktimvo passes into your breast milk. Do not breastfeed during treatment and for 30 days after your last dose of Niktimvo.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

Please see the **Full Prescribing Information**, which includes a more complete discussion of the risks associated with Niktimvo.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit [www.fda.gov/medwatch](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch), or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

You may also report side effects to Incyte Medical Information at 1-855-463-3463.

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