

Novartis launches first US 'biosimilar' drug

REUTERS

London/Zurich, September 3

Novartis kicked off a new era in US medicine on Thursday with the launch of the first "biosimilar" copy of a biotechnology drug approved in the US, at a discount of 15 per cent to the original.

The Swiss drugmaker's generics unit Sandoz said Zarxio, its form of Amgen's white blood cell-boosting product Neupogen, would increase access to an important treatment by offering a "high-quality, more affordable version".

The US biotech group Amgen had tried to stop the sale of Zarxio, also known as fil-

grastim-sndz, but the Washington-based appeals court rejected its attempt to block the launch.

Novartis said the US wholesale list price for a 300 microgram syringe of Zarxio was \$275.66, with the 480 mcg version costing \$438.98.

That represents a discount of 15 per cent to Amgen's list price and is the same price gap set when Zarxio was launched in Europe in 2009. The discount in Europe has since widened to an average of around 20-30 per cent.

Insurers hope biosimilars will eventually cost the public 40-50 per cent less than the original brands.

New drug.