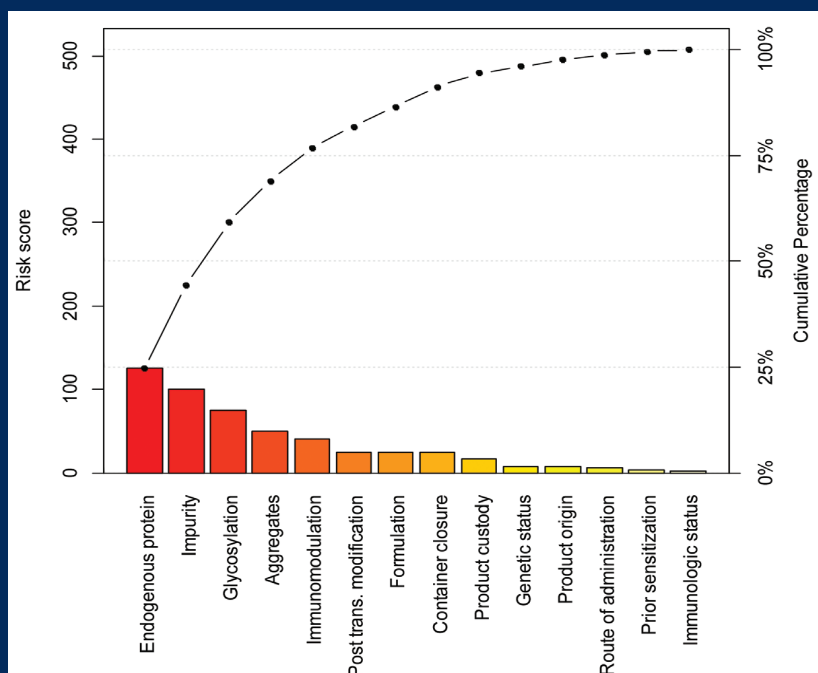


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Statistical Methods for Immunogenicity Assessment



Harry Yang • Jianchun Zhang
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Contents

Preface	xv
List of Figures	xvii
List of Tables	xxi
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	2
1.2 Immunogenicity	4
1.3 Impact of Immunogenicity	5
1.4 Regulatory Environment and Guidelines	6
1.4.1 FDA Guidelines	7
1.4.1.1 Tiered Approach to ADA Assay Development	7
1.4.1.2 Immunogenicity Risk Assessment	9
1.4.2 European Medicines Agency (EMA) Guidance	13
1.4.2.1 EMA Guidelines on Immunogenicity Assessment	13
1.4.2.2 Latest Development of EMA Immunogenicity Guidelines	14
1.4.3 Japanese Regulatory Requirements of Immunogenicity	14
1.5 Statistics in Immunogenicity Risk Assessment	15
1.5.1 <i>In Silico</i> Prediction of Immunogenicity	16
1.5.2 ADA Detection and Quantification	16
1.5.3 Clinical Characterization of ADA	17
1.5.3.1 Characteristics of ADA Immune Response	17
1.5.3.2 Correlation between ADA and PK/PD, Clinical Safety and Efficacy	18
1.5.3.3 Relationship of ADA with Clinical Efficacy and Safety	18
1.5.3.4 Identification of Risk Factors	18
1.5.4 Control of Immunogenicity Risk	19
1.5.4.1 Control of Process/Product Factors	19
1.5.4.2 Biomarkers for Immunogenicity	19
1.6 Statistical Considerations in Comparative Immunogenicity Studies	20

1.7	Concluding Remarks	21
2	ADA Assay Development and Validation	23
2.1	ADA Assays	23
2.1.1	Multi-Tiered Approach	24
2.1.1.1	Screening Assay	25
2.1.1.2	Confirmatory Assay	25
2.1.1.3	Neutralizing Assay	26
2.1.2	Assay Platforms	26
2.2	Assay Development and Validation	28
2.2.1	Assay Parameters	29
2.2.1.1	Cut Point	29
2.2.1.2	Sensitivity	29
2.2.1.3	Drug Tolerance	33
2.2.1.4	Precision	33
2.2.1.5	Robustness	35
2.2.1.6	Ruggedness/Reproducibility	35
2.2.2	Life-Cycle Approach	35
2.3	Design of Experiment	36
2.3.1	Fractional Factorial Design	38
2.3.2	Response Surface Design	41
2.3.3	Split-Plot Design	43
2.3.4	Design Optimality	46
2.3.5	An Example of Neutralizing Antibody Assay Development and Validation	48
2.4	Method Transfer	48
3	Determination of ADA Assay Cut Point	57
3.1	Introduction	57
3.2	Cut Point Experimental Design	58
3.3	Statistical Methods for Cut Point Determination	61
3.3.1	White Paper Approach	62
3.3.1.1	Investigate Distribution and Exclude Outliers	63
3.3.1.2	Compare Assay Run Means and Variances .	65
3.3.1.3	Calculate the Screening Cut Point	66
3.3.1.4	Confirmatory Cut Point	68
3.3.2	Some Recent Developments	68
3.3.2.1	Data Normalization	68
3.3.2.2	Outliers	69
3.3.2.3	Non-Normal Distributions	70
3.3.3	Comparison of Cut Point Methods	83
3.3.3.1	Data Including Positive Donors	83
3.3.3.2	Prediction Interval and Tolerance Interval .	85

3.3.3.3	Confirmatory Cut Point	87
4	Clinical Immunogenicity Assessment	89
4.1	Introduction	90
4.2	Monoclonal Antibodies for the Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)	92
4.2.1	Hypothetical Clinical Trial of an mAb Drug for RA	93
4.2.2	ADA Testing Protocol	94
4.2.3	Analysis Diagram	94
4.3	Statistical Analysis of ADA Status	95
4.3.1	Confidence Intervals of ADA Response Rates	96
4.3.2	Comparison of ADA Response Rates	97
4.3.3	Statistical Tests of ADA Response Rates	98
4.3.4	Dose–Response Model of ADA Response	100
4.3.5	Example	101
4.4	Effects of ADA on Drug Efficacy	103
4.4.1	Categorical Endpoints as Efficacy Measure	104
4.4.1.1	Multiple 2×2 Tables	104
4.4.1.2	Multiple $R \times C$ Tables	105
4.4.1.3	Example	106
4.4.2	Effect of ADA on Survival Outcomes	106
4.4.2.1	Rank-Based Statistical Tests	109
4.4.2.2	Survival Regression Models	110
4.4.2.3	Recurrent Event Data	112
4.4.2.4	Competing-Risks Survival Data	114
4.4.2.5	Example	115
4.4.3	Effect of ADA on Longitudinal Outcomes	116
4.4.3.1	Generalized Linear Model	119
4.4.3.2	Marginal Generalized Linear Model	120
4.4.3.3	Generalized Linear Mixed Model	121
4.4.3.4	Generalized Additive Model	123
4.4.3.5	Example	124
4.5	Effect of ADA on AEs	127
4.5.1	Statistical Methods for AEs	127
4.5.2	Controlling False Discovery Rate	129
4.5.3	Bayesian Hierarchical Model	131
4.5.4	Example	132
4.5.5	Concluding Remarks	134
4.6	Relationship between ADA and Pharmacokinetics	134
4.6.1	Nonlinear Mixed-Effects Models	137
4.6.2	Pharmacokinetics Model for Multiple Doses	137
4.7	Statistical Analysis ADA Onset and Duration	139
4.7.1	Modeling ADA Onset Times	139

4.7.1.1	Hypothesis Testing for Interval-Censored Data	140
4.7.1.2	Regression Models for ADA Onset Times . .	142
4.7.2	Statistical Issues for ADA Duration	142
4.7.2.1	Persistent and Transient ADA	142
4.7.2.2	Statistical Analysis for Doubly Interval-Censored Data	143
4.7.3	Example	144
4.8	Statistical Analysis of ADA Titer	146
4.8.1	Traditional Analysis of ADA Titers	147
4.8.2	Maximum Likelihood Method for ADA Titer	148
4.8.3	Nonparametric Method for Comparing ADA Titers . .	149
4.8.4	Longitudinal Modeling of ADA Titer	150
4.8.5	Example	150
4.9	Meta-Analysis	152
4.9.1	Fixed-Effects and Random-Effects Models	153
4.9.2	Example	154
5	Immunogenicity Risk Control	157
5.1	Introduction	158
5.2	Risk Assessment	160
5.2.1	Identification of Risk Factors	160
5.2.2	Criticality of Risk Factors	161
5.3	Immunogenicity Risk Control	165
5.3.1	Acceptance Range	166
5.3.2	Case Example	169
5.3.2.1	Risk of Residual Host Cell DNA	169
5.3.2.2	Control Strategies	170
5.3.2.3	DNA Inactivation	171
5.3.2.4	Determination of Acceptance Range	171
5.3.2.5	Numerical Calculations	173
5.4	Biomarkers for Immunogenicity	175
5.4.1	General Strategies	178
5.4.2	Clustering Methods	179
5.4.2.1	K -Means Clustering	179
5.4.2.2	Hierarchical Clustering	180
5.4.2.3	Comparison of Clustering by K -Means and HC Using Simulated Data	181
5.4.2.4	Principal Component Analysis	181
5.4.3	Prediction Models	184
5.4.3.1	Logistic Regression Model	185
5.4.3.2	K -Nearest Neighbors (KNN)	185
5.4.3.3	Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA)	186

5.4.3.4	Classification Tree and Random Forest Methods	189
5.4.3.5	Cross Validation and Bagging	190
5.4.3.6	Simple Is a Virtue	190
5.5	Concluding Remarks	191
6	Computational Tools for Immunogenicity Analysis	193
6.1	Read Data into R	193
6.2	ADA Assay and Cut Point	194
6.2.1	ADA Assay Development	194
6.2.2	Implementation of White Paper Approach	197
6.3	Implementation of Statistical Analysis of Clinical Immunogenicity Assessment	201
6.3.1	Statistical Analysis of ADA Status	201
6.3.2	Effects of ADA on Drug Efficacy	202
6.3.3	Statistical Analysis of ADA Onset and Duration	204
6.3.4	Statistical Analysis of ADA Titer	204
6.4	Graphical Tools for Cause and Effect and Design Space Analysis	205
6.4.1	Ishikawa Diagram	205
6.4.2	Pareto Plot	206
6.4.3	Acceptance Region	206
6.5	Immunogenicity Biomarker Discovery	207
6.6	Report Automation	208
6.6.1	Generate Reports in pdf, rtf, and docx Formats	209
6.6.2	Shiny Server: Online Report Generation	211
	Bibliography	213
	Index	235

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Preface

Biotechnology-derived therapeutics including monoclonal antibodies, proteins, and peptides hold great promise for treating various diseases such as cancer and inflammatory diseases. They also represent an important class of therapeutic interventions. However, because of their large size, complex structure, and complicated manufacture process, biopharmaceutical products can lead to immunogenic responses, resulting in formation of anti-drug antibodies (ADAs). Immune responses to non-vaccine biologics have the potential to negatively affect both patient safety and product efficacy. For example, a neutralizing antibody is deleterious if it inhibits the efficacy of the product, and can be harmful when it cross-reacts with an endogenous counterpart of the therapeutic in patients. Non-neutralizing antibodies may affect the pharmacokinetic properties of the drug, thus may affect dosing regime. These immunologically-based consequences may cause drug developers to either terminate development or limit the use of otherwise effective therapies. Therefore, immunogenicity assessment is a key component of biopharmaceutical safety and efficacy evaluation, and a prerequisite for the successful development of biopharmaceuticals. Furthermore, immunogenicity is also a complex phenomenon, owing to myriad factors potentially affecting immunogenicity. For the purposes of this book, these factors are grouped into two categories: product-specific factors such as product origin, glycosylation, aggregation, impurities and formulation, and patient-related characteristics such as genetic makeup and immune status and competency. These numerous and varied factors impose challenges to immunogenicity risk assessment and development of risk mitigation strategies. The intrinsic complexity of detection, quantification, characterization, and control or mitigation of ADA argues for advanced statistical methods in both study design and analysis. This book is intended to provide a single source of information on statistical concepts, principles, methods, and strategies for detection, quantification, assessment, and control of immunogenicity.

The book consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of immunogenicity, its impact on biopharmaceutical development, regulatory requirements, statistical methods and strategies used for immunogenicity detection, quantification, risk assessment, and mitigation. Chapter 2 deals with ADA assay development, optimization, validation, and transfer based on sound statistical principles, design, and analysis. It discusses statistical considerations in many aspects of screening, confirmatory, and neutralizing assay development. Chapter 3 is focused on analysis of cut point, a key assay per-

formance parameter in ADA assay development and validation. It covers a wide range of topics from sample size calculation, data normalization, outlier detection and removal, to selection of proper models for cut point analysis. Challenges and limitations of cut point applied to practical clinical sample testing are also explained. In Chapter 4, we illustrate how to apply statistical modeling approaches to establishing associations between ADA and clinical outcomes, and process parameters, predicting immunogenicity risk, and developing risk-mitigation strategies. Various strategies for immunogenicity risk control are presented in Chapter 5. Finally, the majority of computer codes/algorithms of the statistical methods introduced in the book are provided and explained in Chapter 6.

In recent years, assessment of immunogenicity has emerged as an important regulatory initiative as evidenced by a growing number of white papers on the subject, and publication of the FDA and EMA guidelines. It is also a crucial step toward using risk-based strategies in biopharmaceutical product development. To ensure regulatory compliance, gain deep understanding of immunogenicity, and develop effective immunogenicity risk mitigation strategies, it is imperative to apply robust statistical methods and thinking in the detection, quantification, assessment, and mitigation of immunogenicity risk. To that end, a single book covering statistical concepts, principles, methods, and strategies in immunogenicity assessment will provide an invaluable resource for practitioners in biopharmaceutical therapy development. As immunogenicity risk assessment and control are issues faced by professionals who are involved in non-clinical, clinical, and bioprocess development, this book will be helpful to many individuals in various scientific and regulatory disciplines, including statisticians, pharmacokineticists, toxicologists, clinical assay developers, clinicians, biopharmaceutical engineers, and regulatory reviewers.

We are extremely grateful to John Kimmel, executive editor, Chapman & Hall/CRC Press, for giving us the opportunity to work on this book. We would like to express our gratitude to Laura Richman, Dianne Hirsch, and Kicab Castañeda-Méndez for their expert review of the book and helpful comments.

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List of Figures

1.1	Tiered approach to immunogenicity assessment.	8
2.1	Schematic of bridging assay format.	27
2.2	Illustration of a nonlinear dilution curve and interpolation.	30
2.3	Illustration of a simple precision design of experiment.	33
2.4	Factorial design resolution table.	40
2.5	A typical response surface graph with the maximal response in the center of the region.	41
2.6	Different shape of response surface.	43
2.7	Central composite design for two factors.	44
2.8	Split-plot design in JMP.	47
2.9	Factor setting in JMP custom design.	49
2.10	Response surface model specification in JMP custom design.	50
2.11	Generation of response surface design table.	51
2.12	Illustration of equivalence test.	52
2.13	Scatter plot vs. Bland–Altman plot	56
3.1	Example of balanced design for cut point.	59
3.2	A schematic diagram for screening cut point determination	64
3.3	Illustration of impact of outliers removal order	71
3.4	A flow chart for cut point determination	72
3.5	Density of gamma distribution with various shape and scale (threshold is set at 0).	73
3.6	Density of lognormal distribution with location and scale.	74
3.7	Density of skew- t distribution with location and scale.	76
3.8	Density of log-gamma distribution with location and scale.	77
3.9	Comparison of empirical distribution with fitted distributions for marginal response and estimated random effects.	84
3.10	The impact of cut point on mixed populations	85
4.1	Relationship between treatment, immunogenicity and clinical efficacy.	95
4.2	Kaplan–Meier estimates of % of subjects staying in remission by ADA status.	116

4.3	Kaplan–Meier estimates of % of subjects staying in remission by ADA status for the four dose groups.	117
4.4	Trajectory of DAS28 by ADA status for the four treatment groups.	126
4.5	Concentration of drug as a function of time.	136
4.6	Drug concentration over time after administration of multiple doses.	138
4.7	Survival functions of the ADA onset time by dose group. .	145
4.8	Histogram of the logarithm of ADA titer.	151
4.9	Forest plot	155
5.1	Process of quality risk management.	159
5.2	An example of a fishbone diagram.	161
5.3	Pareto plot of potential risk factors	164
5.4	Acceptance range of drug substance aggregate and impurity when aggregate and impurity do not have any joint effect on product immunogenicity.	167
5.5	Specifications of drug substance aggregate and impurity when aggregate and impurity have a joint effect on product immunogenicity.	168
5.6	Diagram of DNA inactivation using enzyme	172
5.7	Plot of risk score of having an immunogenic event caused by unmethylated CpG motifs, based on annual use of 50 million doses of the product.	175
5.8	Acceptable range of DNA size and amount	176
5.9	Insufficiency of individual or combined assessment of factors X and Y in predicting immunogenic risk: neither factor X , factor Y , nor their combination.	177
5.10	A linear combination of the two factors can clearly differentiate Group A from Group B.	178
5.11	A simulated data set with 100 risk factors from 40 samples. .	182
5.12	Comparing hierarchical clustering with K -means clustering methods	183
5.13	Principal component analysis of the simulated biomarker data	184
5.14	Simulated segregation of 500 samples into immunogenicity-positive and immunogenicity-negative groups.	187
5.15	Immunogenicity distributions based on $W_1 = (1, 0)$, $W_2 = (0, 1)$, $W_3 = (0.707, 0.707)$, $W_4 = (-0.707, 0.707)$	188
5.16	Classification of the simulated 100 biomarker data using <code>rpart()</code> function.	189
6.1	Example of finding optimal Box–Cox transformation. . . .	198
6.2	Example of QQ plot.	198

<i>List of Figures</i>	xix
6.3 Simple scatter plot	210

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--- *List of Tables* ---

1.1	Patient-specific factors that affect immunogenicity and risk-mitigating strategies	11
1.2	Product-specific factors that affect immunogenicity and risk-mitigating strategies	12
2.1	ANOVA table for nested model	34
2.2	Fractional factorial design for five factors	39
2.3	Example of split-plot design	45
2.4	<i>P</i> -values for corrosion-resistance example	45
2.5	ANOVA table for a split-plot design	46
2.6	Example data for illustration of limits of agreement of Bland–Altman method	54
3.1	A numerical example of variance components analysis . .	59
3.2	The minimal required sample size to meet the 0.05 precision for different intraclass correlation and different number of replicates	62
3.3	ANOVA table for testing assay run means	66
3.4	Comparison of cut point estimation(scenario a)	80
3.5	Comparison of cut point estimation(scenario b1)	81
3.6	Comparison of cut point estimation(scenario b2)	81
3.7	Comparison of cut point estimation(scenario c1)	81
3.8	Comparison of cut point estimation(scenario c2)	82
3.9	Comparison of cut point estimation from different random effects models	83
4.1	The 2×2 table for ADA responses in two groups.	97
4.2	The $2 \times K$ table of ADA dose–response data in multiple dose groups	100
4.3	Number and percentage of ADA+ patients by treatment group	101
4.4	Estimates of OR and RR of ADA responses between the treatment groups and the placebo group	102
4.5	Statistical tests that compare the ADA response rates between the treatment groups and the placebo group . . .	102

4.6	The 2×2 table of ADA status and clinical response in the k th dose group	104
4.7	RA recurrence status by ADA status and dose level	106
4.8	Stratified log-rank test for the effect of ADA on remission after controlling for dose level	117
4.9	Parameter estimates of the Cox model for RA recurrence .	118
4.10	Common distributions from the exponential family	119
4.11	Parameter estimates of the marginal linear model for DAS28 from GEE	125
4.12	Parameter estimates of the random-intercept model	126
4.13	The 2×2 table of AE and ADA reaction in the j th dose group for the k th AE	128
4.14	The 2×2 table of testing the effect of ADA on all types of AE	129
4.15	AEs by event type, treatment group and ADA status . . .	133
4.16	Unadjusted mean and median ADA titer by dose group .	151
4.17	Estimates of ADA titers by dose group from the likelihood method	152
5.1	Determination of severity scores	162
5.2	Severity definition	163
5.3	Likelihood definition	163
5.4	Parameter values needed for design of control strategy . .	174
6.1	Summary of linear regression model fitting: lm1	210

1

Introduction

CONTENTS

1.1	Background	2
1.2	Immunogenicity	4
1.3	Impact of Immunogenicity	5
1.4	Regulatory Environment and Guidelines	6
1.4.1	FDA Guidelines	7
1.4.1.1	Tiered Approach to ADA Assay Development	7
1.4.1.2	Immunogenicity Risk Assessment	9
1.4.2	European Medicines Agency (EMA) Guidance	13
1.4.2.1	EMA Guidelines on Immunogenicity Assessment	13
1.4.2.2	Latest Development of EMA Immunogenicity Guidelines	14
1.4.3	Japanese Regulatory Requirements of Immunogenicity	14
1.5	Statistics in Immunogenicity Risk Assessment	15
1.5.1	<i>In Silico</i> Prediction of Immunogenicity	16
1.5.2	ADA Detection and Quantification	16
1.5.3	Clinical Characterization of ADA	17
1.5.3.1	Characteristics of ADA Immune Response	17
1.5.3.2	Correlation between ADA and PK/PD, Clinical Safety and Efficacy	18
1.5.3.3	Relationship of ADA with Clinical Efficacy and Safety	18
1.5.3.4	Identification of Risk Factors	18
1.5.4	Control of Immunogenicity Risk	19
1.5.4.1	Control of Process/Product Factors	19
1.5.4.2	Biomarkers for Immunogenicity	19
1.6	Statistical Considerations in Comparative Immunogenicity Studies	20
1.7	Concluding Remarks	21

1.1 Background

The discovery of DNA in 1953, and the many advances made afterwards in cellular and molecular biology in the late 1970s brought into existence the biotechnology industry. Of particular importance was the development of recombinant DNA technology which enabled the creation and production of proteins in a laboratory setting. These technological advances have provided biopharmaceutical companies with the tools needed to develop “targeted therapies” aimed at the biological underpinnings of various diseases. The first recombinant biologic therapy licensed in the United States (U.S.) was recombinant human insulin which was approved by U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1982. Since the approval of recombinant human insulin, more than 200 biological products have been approved over the past several decades, treating diseases ranging from cancers to rare genetic disorders (Guilford-Blake and Strickland (2008)). As of 2013, more than 900 molecules, targeting over 100 diseases including cancer, multiple sclerosis, and rheumatoid arthritis, were at various stages of development (PhRMA (2013)). These biotechnology-derived therapeutics hold a great deal of promise for future medicinal innovation and breakthroughs.

However, despite the promise of therapeutic proteins and monoclonal antibodies to meet unmet medical needs, development of biologics poses a host of unique challenges. Biopharmaceutical products are often large in size, having complex structures which are often modified post-translationally, e.g., glycosylation, and/or during manufacturing to improve product quality, e.g. pegylation. Additionally, most therapeutic proteins are produced in non-human cell lines and therefore are not identical to the homologous human protein. In light of these complexities, it is not surprising that the manufacture of biologics requires complicated and tightly controlled manufacturing processes. An additional consideration is that most biologics are administered intravenously or subcutaneously. As a result, therapeutic proteins and monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) have the potential to induce immune responses when administered to patients.

One common immunogenic response to therapeutic proteins and mAbs is the development of anti-drug antibodies (ADA). While the development of ADAs against therapeutic proteins is common and often has no measurable clinical effects, ADA responses have the potential to negatively affect both patient safety and product efficacy (Shankar et al. (2008)). For instance, for a therapeutic protein that has a non-redundant endogenous counterpart, a neutralizing antibody response can cross-react with the endogenous protein, causing serious consequences (FDA (2014)). One example is recombinant human erythropoietin (rhEPO) which is used to treat anemia. It was shown that neutralizing antibodies (NABs) directed against rhEPO secondary to administration of the product also blocked the function of endogenous erythropoietin

which was causal in the development of pure red cell aplasia (Casadevall et al. (2002)). ADA binding to the therapeutic can also impact product efficacy. For instance, 50% patients treated with the murine monoclonal antibody OKT3 developed human anti-mouse antibodies (HAMAs) that correlated with decreased efficacy (Kuus-Reichel et al. (1994)). Readers interested in reviews on immunogenicity are referred to van de Weert and Møller (2008) and Baker et al. (2010).

In recent years, various methods and strategies have been developed to reduce and manage immunogenicity of biologic products. Early efforts were centered on methods for measuring ADA. Now, in addition to ADA monitoring, therapeutic protein manufacturers are increasingly focusing on engineering therapeutics with reduced risk of inducing ADA responses. Approaches include development of humanized proteins, removal of T-cell epitopes, and selection of less immunogenic proteins using *in silico*, *in vitro*, and *in vivo* prediction methods. Therapeutic proteins are often produced in non-human cell lines and species, e.g., mice. As such, their protein sequences differ from the human counterpart, thus increasing immunogenic potential of the therapeutic protein when administered to human recipients. Humanization of proteins produced in non-human species is a process to increase the proteins similarity, through modifying non-human sequences to homologous human sequences. In certain cases, humanization has been shown to be effective in reducing the risk of immunogenicity. In one retrospective review of ADA responses to mAbs, murine mAbs were shown to have the highest frequency of ADA responses, and that replacement of the mouse immunoglobulin constant regions with human sequences reduced the development of ADAs (Hwang and Foote (2005)). ADA responses to T-cell epitopes is also well recognized. It has been shown that the presence of T-cell epitopes in a therapeutic protein is one driver of ADA responses. When T-cell receptors recognize small fragments derived from protein antigens coupled with major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class II molecules on the surface of antigen-presenting cells (APCs), T-cell responses are activated. Therefore, one way to minimize immunogenic risk is to deactivate T-cell responses to a therapeutic protein. For this purpose, several methods have been utilized to identify and design proteins that have a more acceptable immunogenic profile. The strategies include removal of T-cell epitopes through *in silico*, *in vitro*, and *in vivo* prediction, patient immunosuppression and tolerization (Adair and Ozanne (2002)). Using *in-vitro* experiments, T-cell epitopes can be screened and then proteins with the least T-cell epitopes can be used for subsequent development. Immunosuppression reduces immunogenicity through treating subjects with drugs that suppress T-cell activities; whereas the tolerance approach focuses on desensitizing the immune system to the therapeutic protein so that the therapeutic protein is no longer recognized as foreign.

As pointed out by De Groot and Martin (2009), successful mitigation of immunogenicity potential of a therapy is likely to rely on a combined approach. It uses rational sequence design, and *in vitro* and *in vivo* animal testing to