



The USFDA Generic Drug Approval Pathway: A Comprehensive Review of ANDA Requirements and Post Approval Change Management

Mr. Aditya Abasaheb Ware¹, Ms. Prajкта Vitthal Balakshe²

YSPM's Yashoda Technical Campus, Faculty of Pharmacy, Wadhe, Satara.

Corresponding Author Mail: adityaware16@gmail.com

ABSTRACT :

The USFDA's regulatory framework for generic drugs has revolutionized global access to affordable medications through a balanced system of rigorous quality standards and efficient approval pathways. This review analyzes the complete lifecycle of generic drug regulation, from pre-market requirements including pharmaceutical equivalence and bioequivalence demonstration to post-approval change management. The system has achieved remarkable success, with generic drugs now accounting for approximately 65% of the global pharmaceutical market and 58% of US prescriptions. However, manufacturers face significant challenges including patent litigation complexities and operational demands of post-approval modifications, particularly facility and control changes which constitute over two-thirds of reported changes. Critical success factors include adherence to structured submission formats, compliance with scale-up and post-approval change (SUPAC) guidelines, and strategic navigation of patent expirations. As the generic drug market continues to expand toward projected \$100 billion valuation, this study provides essential insights for stakeholders to optimize regulatory strategies while maintaining quality and accessibility in an evolving pharmaceutical landscape.

Keywords : [Generic drug approval, ANDA submission, Post-approval changes, USFDA regulations, Bioequivalence studies, Hatch-Waxman Act, GDUFA III]

Introduction

The registration of generic drugs ensures the availability of affordable and effective medications, reducing healthcare costs and increasing access to essential medicines. Generic drugs provide a cost-effective alternative to expensive brand-name medications, with studies showing up to 11% reduction in prescription costs without compromising quality, and have captured over 65% of the global market [1]. The USFDA plays a vital role in approving generic drugs, guaranteeing their quality, safety, and efficacy. Generic drugs are manufactured without innovator company permission after patent expiration, and their approval relies on demonstrating bioequivalence and pharmaceutical equivalence to the brand-name drug, ensuring identical active ingredients, safe inactive ingredients, proper labeling, and consistent manufacturing processes [2]. Generic medications, often called specialty generics, super generics, hybrid drugs, value-added generics, and off-patent pharmaceuticals, have a substantial market anticipated to hit \$84 billion by 2024, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8% projected over the following decade [3].

Regulatory Framework

The USFDA's regulatory framework for generic drugs is outlined under the Abbreviated New Drug Application (ANDA) process, governed by Section 505(j) of the Food, Drugs and Cosmetics Act [4]. The FDA now mandates format for all submissions since 2017, with recent updates requiring structured product labeling (SPL) in XML format to enable automated reviews [5, 6].

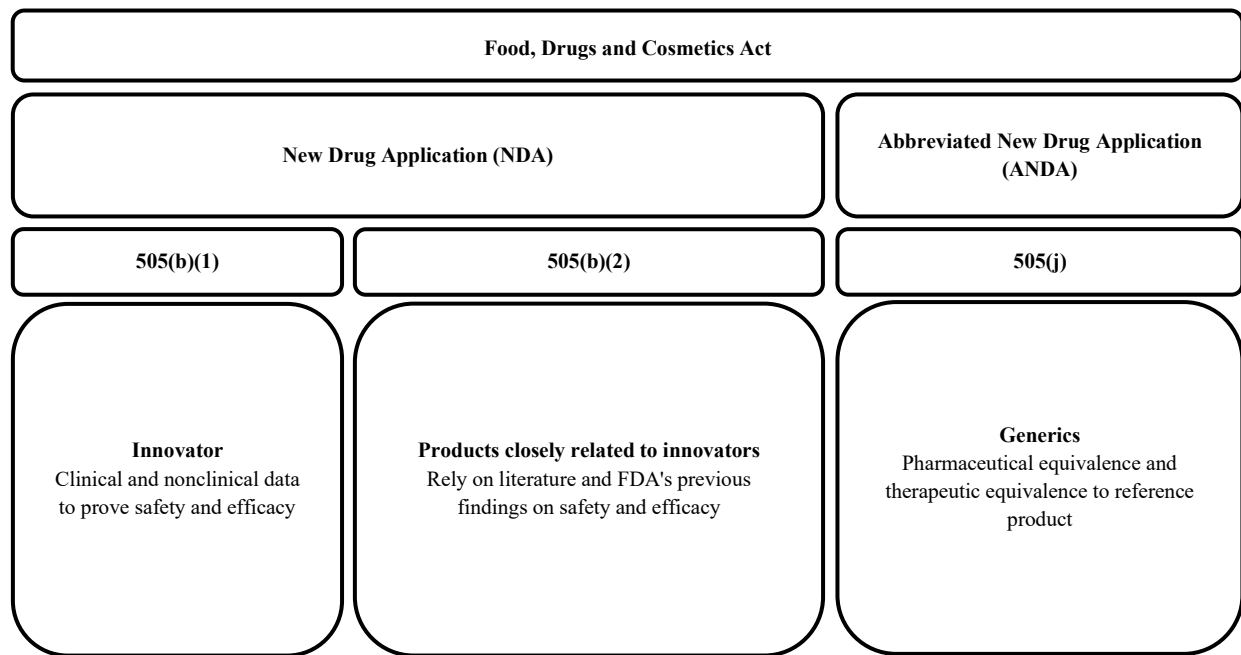
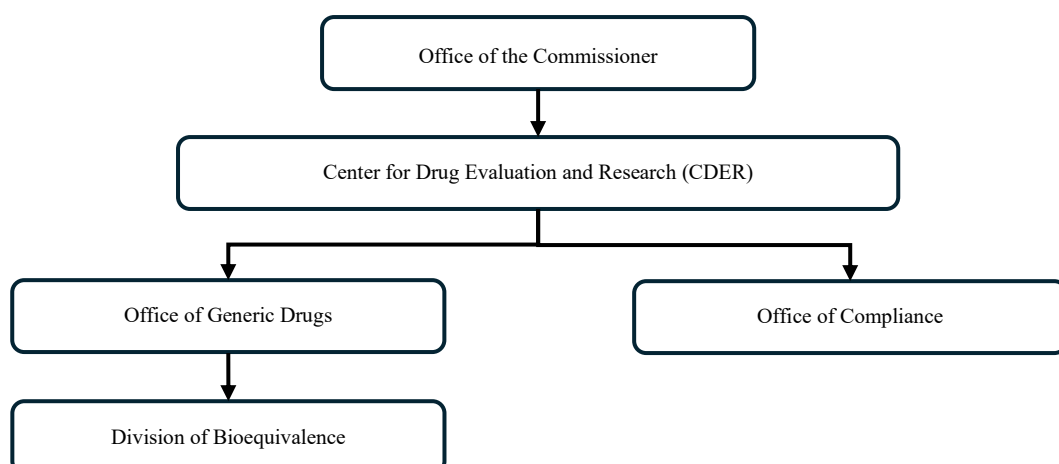


Figure 1: Overview of the regulatory framework in the US [4]

FDA Organization Relevant to Generic Drug Registration

1. **Office of the Commissioner [8]**
Offers comprehensive leadership and guidance for the FDA, ensuring the agency successfully fulfills its mission to safeguard public health.
2. **Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) [9]**
 - Role: The primary center responsible for the regulation of both brand-name and generic drugs.
 - Functions:
 - i. Evaluates Abbreviated New Drug Applications (ANDAs) for generic medications.
 - ii. Ensures that generic drugs are therapeutically equivalent to their brand-name counterparts.
 - iii. Evaluates the safety, efficacy, and quality of generic drug products.
3. **Office of Generic Drugs (OGD) [10]**
 - Role: A division within CDER specifically focused on the review and approval of generic drug applications.
 - Functions:
 - i. Manages the ANDA submission process, including the assessment of bioequivalence studies.
 - ii. Develops guidance documents and policies to facilitate the generic drug approval process.
 - iii. Engages with stakeholders to address issues related to generic drug development and market entry.
4. **Division of Bioequivalence [11]**
 - Role: A part of the OGD that specifically evaluates bioequivalence studies submitted in ANDAs.
 - Functions:
 - i. Reviews data to ensure that generic drugs perform similarly to their reference products in terms of absorption and effect.
5. **Office of Compliance [12]**
 - Role: Ensures that approved generic drugs are manufactured in compliance with FDA regulations.
 - Functions:
 - i. Conducts inspections of manufacturing facilities to enforce Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP).
 - ii. Monitors post-market compliance and addresses any violations.

Figure 2: FDA Organizational Structure for Generic Drug Registration [8]



Requirements for ANDA Approval

In order to receive approval, ANDA applicants are required to show that their generic drug product fulfills these conditions.:

1. Same Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API): The generic drug must contain the same API as the Reference Listed Drug (RLD) [5]
2. The generic medication must be administered using the same method as the reference listed drug (RLD) [5].
3. The generic medication must come in the same dosage form as the RLD. [5].
4. Same Strength: The generic drug Must have the same strength as the RLD [5].
5. Same Labeling: The generic drug Must have generally the same labeling as the RLD [5].
6. Bioequivalence: The generic drug must demonstrate bioequivalence to the RLD [5].

Hatch-Waxman Act

The Hatch-Waxman Act, established in 1984, is a significant piece of law that permits generic medications to enter the market without undergoing costly clinical trials mandated for their branded equivalents. This legislation seeks to reconcile the interests of consumers, the brand-name pharmaceutical sector, and the generic drug business by increasing the availability of affordable generic medications while fostering incentives for the research and development of novel pharmaceuticals. The Hatch-Waxman Act has significantly stimulated the expansion of the generics business in the United States, with generic medicine versions currently comprising 58 percent of the market by volume. This statute permits generic medicine producers to submit Abbreviated New medicine Applications (ANDAs) for approved pharmaceuticals, establishing bioequivalence to the previously sanctioned drug [6, 13]. The legislation has effectively enhanced access to affordable medications while fostering innovation and the creation of novel pharmaceuticals. The Hatch-Waxman Act has fostered robust competition among generic drugs, leading to reduced pricing for consumers in the United States relative to other nations. The act has been essential in transforming the generics business in the US, enhancing access to affordable medications, and fostering innovation and the development of new pharmaceuticals.

Patent Certifications

The generic applicant must make one of four certifications for each patent listed for the reference listed drug:

1. Paragraph I: No patent information has been submitted to the FDA [5].
2. Paragraph II: The listed patent has expired [5].
3. Paragraph III: The listed patent will expire on a certain date, and the generic will not enter the market before that date [5].
4. Paragraph IV: The patent is invalid or will not be infringed by the generic drug [5].

Implications of Certifications

Paragraph I and II: FDA may approve the ANDA immediately [5].

Paragraph III: FDA may approve the ANDA after the patent's expiration date [5].

Paragraph IV: Complex implications, often involving patent litigation, as the generic applicant alleges the patent is invalid or not infringed [5].

Common Technical Document (CTD)

The Common Technical Document (CTD) is a harmonized format for submitting drug applications.

Modules of CTD

Module 1: Region-specific, containing administrative information and prescribing information [5].

Module 2: General overviews and comprehensive summaries, which encompass Quality Overall Summaries, as well as Clinical and Non-Clinical Overviews and Summaries [5].

Module 3: Quality, covering pharmaceutical and technical aspects affecting the quality of the drug product [5].

Module 4: Non-Clinical Study Reports, providing evidence of the safety of the drug product [5].

Module 5: Clinical Study Reports, showcasing the efficacy of the pharmaceutical product through the findings and documentation of clinical trials [5].

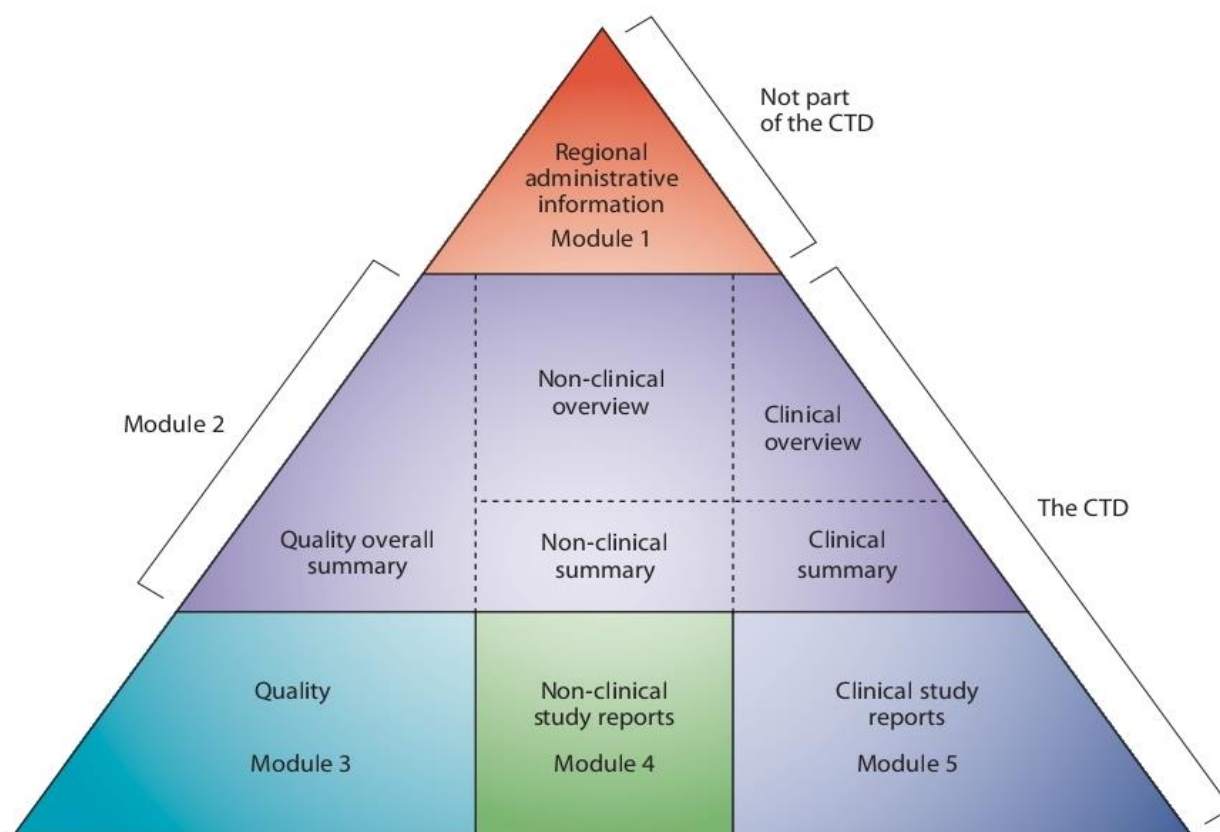


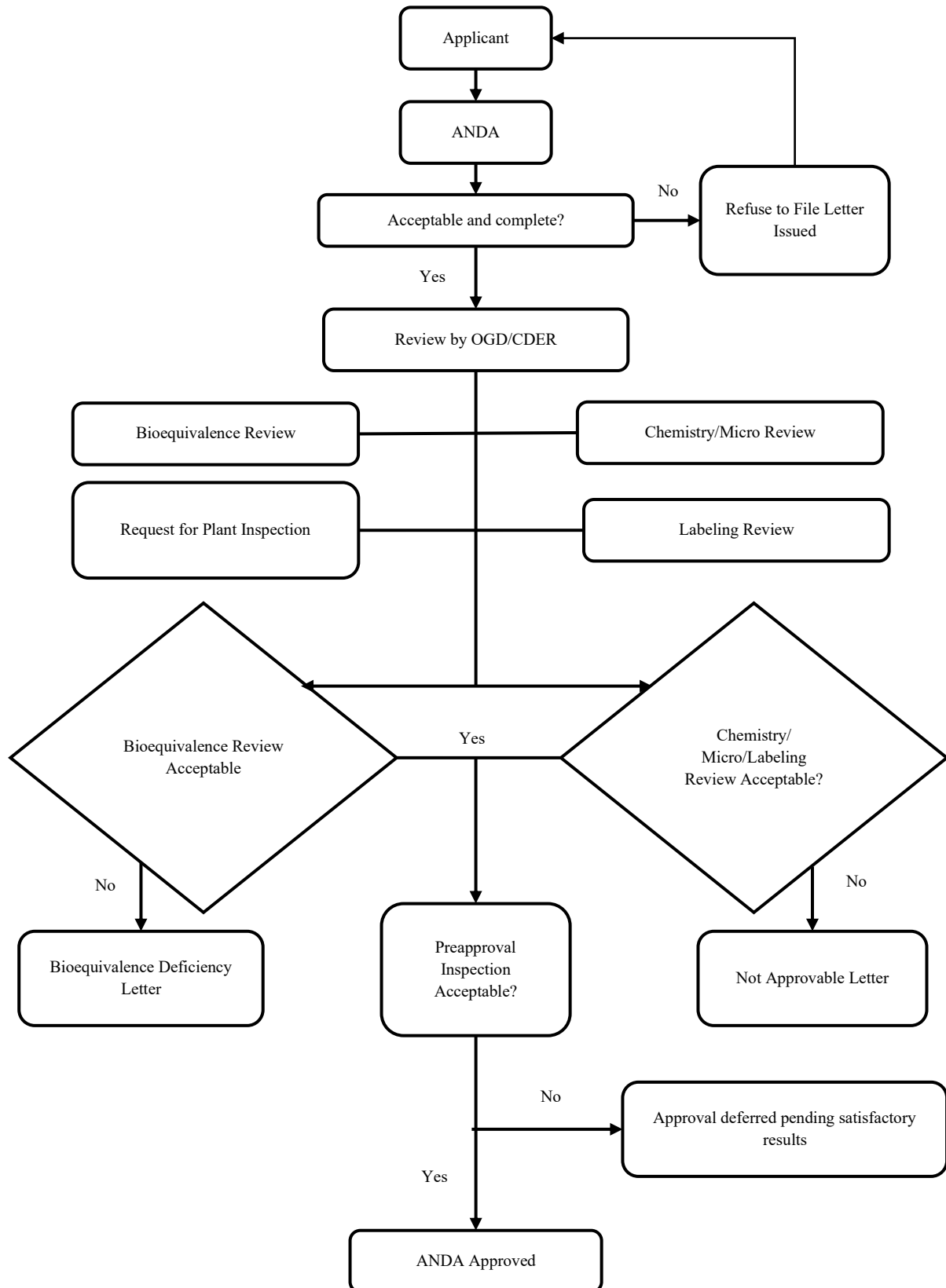
Figure 3: CTD Triangle

Generic Drug Product Registration Requirements in the US

1. eCTD Submission: Mandatory for NDA/ANDA submissions [5].
2. US FDA Guidance: Follow CFR documents and FDA sections (e.g., 505(b) for NDA, 505(j) for ANDA) [5].
3. Application Types: [5]
 - NDA for new drugs
 - ANDA for generic drugs
 - BLA for biological applications
4. Submission: Direct submission by the applicant or a GDEA-certified agent [5].
5. Administrative Information: Includes cover letter, forms (356h), application information, certifications, patent information and exclusivity [5].
6. Format Requirements: [5]
 - Letter size (8.5x11 inches)
 - Font size 12 in Times New Roman
 - Smaller font size (8-10) for tables and figures
7. Labeling and Packaging: [5]
 - Package inserts
 - Proposed labels and cartons similar to the RLD
8. Clinical Investigator Information: Provided in Module 5 [5].
9. Waiver Requests: In-vivo BE study waivers in Module 1 [5].
10. Annotated Draft Labeling: Side-by-side comparison with RLD [5].
11. Environmental Assessment: Categorical exclusion certification [5].
12. Risk Management Plans: For post-marketing surveillance [5].
13. Residual Solvents: Declaration according to USP [5].
14. Component Information: Supplier/manufacturer details in 3.2.R format [5].
15. Stability Data: Accelerated studies for three months at original submission [5].
16. Structured product labeling (SPL) and study tagging file (STF): Mandatory in eCTD submissions [5].

ANDA Regulatory Review Process

The ANDA review process starts with submission to the Office of Generic Drugs (OGD) or Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER). The FDA assigns an ANDA number, dates the submission, and conducts a preliminary review. The review considers factors like bioequivalence, chemistry, microbiology, and labeling. The FDA finishes a review of the filing within 60 days to verify that the application is complete and meets the necessary standards [5].

Figure 4: ANDA Review Process [5]

Bioequivalence Review Process

The two main characteristics of a generic drug to be therapeutically equivalent to the innovator drug are:

1. Pharmaceutical Equivalence: Same strength, dosage form, and route of administration.
2. Bioequivalence: Similar

Bioavailability when studied under the same conditions [5].

Bioequivalence is determined by evaluating:

- Area Under the Curve (AUC)
- Maximum concentration of drug (Cmax)

A generic product is considered bioequivalent to the branded product if the 90% Confidence Interval (CI) of the mean AUC and relative mean Cmax falls within 80% to 125% [5].

Labeling Review Process

The label review process guarantees that the labeling for both the innovator and the generic drug is identical.

Approval Outcomes:

After the final administrative review and resolution of deficiencies, the application may receive:

1. Full Approval Letter: Details Conditions of approval, allowing the applicant to market the generic drug product [5].
2. Tentative Approval Letter: The FDA tentatively approves the application, but the applicant cannot market the product yet due to existing patents or exclusivities on the reference listed drug (RLD) [5].

Post-Approval Changes in Generic Drug Products

After obtaining approval for an Abbreviated New Drug Application (ANDA), generic drug manufacturers must adhere to post-approval requirements, including submitting final labeling content, electronic drug registration and listing, and pharmacovigilance activities [14, 15, 16]. The USFDA categorizes post-approval changes into three levels:

1. Major Changes (Level I): Substantial potential to impact identity, strength, quality, purity, or potency. Requires prior approval supplement (PAS) and authorization from the FDA before it can be distributed [14, 15].
2. Moderate Changes (Level II): There is a moderate likelihood of affecting the identity, strength, quality, purity, or potency. Two types:
 - Changes Being Effected in 30 Days (CBE-30): Supplement submission required 30 days before distribution [15, 16].
 - Revisions Implemented (CBE-0): Distribution may begin once the FDA receives the supplement [14, 16].
3. Minor Changes (Level III): Minimal potential to impact identity, strength, quality, purity, or potency. Reported in the next Annual Report [14, 15, 16].

Table 1: Classification of Post Approval Changes.[15]

Type of Changes	Rules	Type of Application
Major Change	21 CFR 314.70(b)	Prior Approval Supplement
Moderate Change	21 CFR 314.70(c)(5)	Changes Being effected in 30 days
	21CFR 314.70(c)(6)	Changes Being effected
Minor Change	21 CFR 314.70(d)	Annual report/notification

Scale-Up and Post Approval Changes (SUPAC) Guidance

The Scale-Up and Post Approval Changes (SUPAC) framework addresses modifications in drug manufacturing processes and compositions after a drug's approval. These changes can involve raw materials, manufacturing processes, equipment, or sites, and can impact the quality attributes of the drug product.[15]

Scientific Rationale:

- Expedite post-approval processes for drug products.
- Ensure the safety and effectiveness of drugs.
- Reduce regulatory burdens on the industry.[15]

Purpose of Guidance:

This guidance is aimed at sponsors of New Drug Applications (NDAs), Abbreviated New Drug Applications (ANDAs), and Abbreviated Antibiotic Applications (AADAs) who plan to implement changes during the post-approval period, specifically regarding:

1. Components or composition of the drug.
2. Manufacturing site.
3. Scale-up or scale-down of manufacturing.
4. Manufacturing processes and equipment for immediate-release oral formulations.[15]

SUPAC Categories:

The FDA has Established specific guidelines for different dosage forms:

- SUPAC-IR: Immediate-release solid oral dosage forms.
- SUPAC-MR: Modified-release solid oral dosage forms.

- SUPAC-SS: Semisolid non-sterile dosage forms such as creams, ointments, gels, and lotions [15].

Table 2: Post-Approval CMC Changes Reported to the FDA (2012) [9]

Change Category	Percentage	Key Modifications
Facility Changes	34.3%	Addition of new production or testing sites, including manufacturing facilities, packaging centers, analytical labs, or suppliers of inactive Ingredients.
Control Changes	33.5%	Updates to quality control measures, such as revised testing criteria, in-process monitoring adjustments, or modified stability study protocols.
Process Changes	15.9%	Modifications in production methods, including batch size adjustments, equipment upgrades, alternative techniques, or new synthesis pathways for drug substances.

The increase in major submissions (PASS) stems from both proactive enhancements (e.g., process optimization, advanced technologies) and unforeseen challenges (e.g., failed quality tests, supply chain interruptions). [14]

Strengthening process knowledge during development and implementing effective quality monitoring can mitigate unnecessary post-approval changes. [14]

Table 3: FDA Review Timelines for Prior Approval Supplements (PAS): Fiscal Years 2018-2022 [14]

Submission Type	Performance Goal
Standard PASs or PAS Major Amendments	
- Without preapproval inspection	90% reviewed within 6 months
- With preapproval inspection	90% reviewed within 10 months
Priority PASs or PAS Major Amendments	
- Without preapproval inspection	90% reviewed within 4 months
- For inspections with preapproval (and timely PFC)	90% are evaluated within 8 months.
- For inspections with preapproval (without timely PFC)	90% are evaluated within 10 months.
Standard and Priority PAS Minor Amendments	
- All cases	90% reviewed within 3 months

PFC = Pre-Submission Facility Correspondence

Barriers and Challenges in Regulatory Filing of Generic Medications in the US

The generic drug industry faces several challenges in regulatory filing in the US, including:

1. Complex Regulatory Framework: The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDC Act) has undergone several amendments, such as the Food and Drug Administration Modernization Act (FDAMA) and the Biologics Price Competition and Innovation Act (BPCIA), which impact generic drug development and approval [17].
2. Patent Challenges: Paragraph IV patent challenges have increased, with over 80% of brand-name drugs facing challenges from generic manufacturers [1].
3. Regulatory Backlog: The FDA Faces a backlog of branded and generic drug applications, which can delay approval and market entry [1].
4. Quality and Inspection: Ensuring quality and compliance with FDA regulations is crucial, particularly for facilities overseas [1].

GDUFA III: Key Provisions & Impact

Goal: Speed up the accessibility of generic medications while ensuring adherence to quality standards [18].

1. Enhanced Review Timelines
 - Standard ANDAs: 10-month review (vs. 12-15 months pre-GDUFA) [18]
 - Prior Approval Supplements (PAS): 6-month review for major changes [18]
 - Amendments: 6-month review clock [18]
2. First-Cycle Review Improvements
 - “Right First Time” Initiative: 30% reduction in review cycles due to:
 - i. Mandatory pre-submission meetings [19]
 - ii. ANDA Assessment Tool implementation [19]
3. Facility Oversight
 - Remote Regulatory Assessments (RRAs): 45% of facility evaluations conducted remotely in 2023 [20]
 - Risk-based inspection scheduling reduced backlog by 22% [20]
4. Economic Impact
 - \$2.1 billion annual savings from faster generic entry [21]
 - 78% first-cycle approval rate for ANDAs in 2023 (vs. 62% in 2020) [21]

Competitive Generic Therapies (CGT) Program

Goal: Stimulate generic competition for drugs with ≤ 1 existing generic [22].

A. Program Mechanics

Table 4: Eligibility and Assessment Standards for Competitive Generic Therapies (CGT) Program

Feature	Detail
Eligibility	Drugs with ≤ 1 generic or in shortage [22]
Review Timeline	6-8 months (vs. 10-month standard) [24]

Exclusivity	180-day market exclusivity for first CGT [24]
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- B. Outcomes (2020-2023)
 - 156 designations granted, including:
 - i. Epinephrine auto-injectors [25]
 - ii. Cabazitaxel (prostate cancer) [25]
 - iii. Vasopressin (critical care) [25]
 - Price reductions: 58% average discount for CGT-approved products [26]
- C. Scientific Advancements
 - Waived BE studies for 12 CGTs using PBPK modeling [27]
 - Alternative BE endpoints approved for 8 complex products [27]

Regulatory Challenges

- i. Resource Constraints: FDA requires 14% more reviewers to meet GDUFA III goals [28]
- ii. Complex Generics: Only 32% of CGT designations were for complex products in 2023 [29]

Opportunities and Future Prospects

Despite these challenges, the generic drug industry is expected to grow, driven by:

1. Increasing Demand: The generic market is projected to reach \$100 billion, with a growing share of the US market [1].
2. Patent Expirations: Several blockbuster drugs are scheduled to lose patent protection, opening doors to cheaper generic alternatives [1].
3. Government Initiatives: Initiatives like Jan-Aushadhi Kendra in India aim to promote generic drug access and affordability [1].

Conclusion

The USFDA's regulatory framework for generic drugs, established through the landmark Hatch-Waxman Act [7], has successfully created a balanced ecosystem that ensures medication affordability while maintaining rigorous quality standards. By implementing the ANDA process [4] with its stringent requirements for pharmaceutical equivalence and bioequivalence (80-125% CI for AUC/Cmax) [5], the FDA guarantees that generic medications match their brand-name counterparts in safety and efficacy. The tiered review process that includes CDER, OGD, and the Division of Bioequivalence [9-11] ensures thorough supervision, while managing post-approval changes via SUPAC guidelines [15] upholds quality across the entire lifecycle of a product. Despite these robust systems, challenges persist, including complex patent litigations (particularly Paragraph IV certifications) [5] and regulatory backlogs [1], which manufacturers must navigate strategically. The framework's success is evidenced by generics capturing 65% of the global market [1] and 58% of US prescriptions by volume [7], delivering significant healthcare cost savings. As the industry evolves toward a projected \$100 billion market [1], success will depend on manufacturers' ability to maintain compliance with eCTD standards [5], efficiently manage post-approval changes [14-16], and capitalize on upcoming patent expirations [1]. This dynamic regulatory environment continues to serve as a model for delivering affordable, high-quality medications while balancing innovation and accessibility in pharmaceutical care.

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