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Asia Deal Watch: Astellas, GO Team Up On Targeted Cancer Therapy

by Joseph Haas

Astellas subsidiary Xyphos will partner with GO to discover novel antibodies against two glycoprotein targets. SciNeuro picks up abandoned GSK programs in cardiovascular medicine for potential use in the neurodegeneration space.

Scrip regularly covers business development and deal making in the biopharmaceutical industry. Deal Watch is supported by deal intelligence from Biomedtracker.

Astellas/Xyphos And GO Target Glycoproteins In IO Pact

Astellas Pharma, Inc. and US biotech *GO Therapeutics* unveiled a research collaboration and licensing agreement on 1 June to apply advances in glycoproteomics toward the development of novel, targeted cancer immunotherapies. Under the agreement, GO will use Astellas's US subsidiary *Xyphos Biosciences, Inc.*'s Accel platform and convertibleCAR (convertible chimeric antigen receptor) technology in the discovery effort.

Xyphos will pay GO $20.5m up front under the deal, with the Cambridge, MA-based biotech eligible to earn milestones and other contingency payments that could reach as high as $763m. GO previously partnered with *Roche Holding AG* on a target-specific cancer discovery collaboration employing its glycoproteomic technology in 2018. (Also see "*Deal Watch: Astellas/Cytokinetics Extend Partnership, Make Progress On SMA Candidate*" - Scrip, 5 Oct, 2018.)

The two companies will work together to identify novel antibodies with high affinity to two different glycoprotein targets and apply the antibodies to a range of therapeutic modalities. GO will lead the discovery portion of the tie-up, while Astellas will be responsible for research activities, clinical development and potential commercialization of potential therapies resulting from the research.

SciNeuro To Revisit GSK's Work With L-PLA2 Inhibition In Alzheimer's

China's *SciNeuro Pharmaceuticals* inked a global license and option agreement on 1 June with *GlaxoSmithKline plc* to apply the latter's development work in inhibition of the Lp-PLA2 enzyme. While GSK attempted to employ that mechanism in cardiovascular therapy, with the failed Phase III candidate darapladib, SciNeuro instead will purpose Lp-PLA2 inhibition towards Alzheimer's disease. (Also see "*The end is nigh for GSK's darapladib*" - Scrip, 13 May, 2014.)

Since GSK ended its work on darapladib in 2014, the Lp-PLA2 enzyme has been implicated in the pathogenesis of neurodegenerative diseases, SciNeuro noted. Under the agreement, the Shanghai biopharma obtains a worldwide license to intellectual property covering certain GSK Lp-PLA2 inhibitors (not including darapladib) and will be responsible for their further development through clinical proof-of-concept.

At completion of those studies, GSK will have an option to reclaim rights to the compounds in all territories except for greater China, which SciNeuro would retain, under pre-agreed terms, for subsequent development and commercialization. SciNeuro will pay an upfront fee, near-term and downstream milestones, and royalties to GSK. If GSK exercises its option, SciNeuro will get an option-exercise fee and could realize milestones and royalty payments from GSK. GSK also will hold a right to purchase equity in SciNeuro.

Medipost To Become Biggest Shareholder Of OmniaBio

South Korean cell therapy firm *Medipost Co., Ltd.* has agreed to buy a 39.6% stake in Canada's OmniaBio Inc. for C$90m ($71.1m) to advance into North America's cell and gene therapy contract manufacturing business.

Following the transaction announced on 31 May, Medipost will become the largest shareholder of the Canadian contract development and manufacturing organization, which produces gene-modified cell therapies and viral vectors, compliant with cGMP standards. A subsidiary of the Toronto-based Centre for Commercialization of Regenerative Medicine, OmniaBio said it plans to use the proceeds to build out its research and manufacturing facilities.

Medipost said it expects the deal will accelerate its entry into the North American market by setting up a strategic manufacturing base for clinical development and commercialization of Cartistem, its first-generation stem cell therapy for degenerative osteoarthritis, as well as SMUP-IA-01, a second-generation stem cell therapy for osteoarthritis. (Also see "*Medipost Accelerates Global Push For Lead Stem Cell Therapy*" - Scrip, 16 Mar, 2021.)

ImaginAb, Yantai DongCheng Partner On Radiopharmaceutical Development

Imaging and radiopharmaceutical-focused *ImaginAb, Inc.* agreed to a licensing deal on 24 May with *Yantai Dongcheng Beifang Pharmaceutical Co Ltd*. commercialize the US firm's CD8

ImmunoPET agent zirconium Zr 89 crefmirlimab berdoxam (Zr-89 IAB22M2C) in the greater China market. ImaginAb will receive license and milestone payments and up to double-digit royalties under the deal.

Zr-89 IAB22M2C will be initially used in third-party sponsored clinical trials to achieve market authorization, the partners said. Zr-89 IAB22M2C, a radionuclide-labeled monoclonal antibody that binds the CD8 receptor on human T-cells, is used for non-invasive PET imaging of CD8 T-cells, to provide specific, quantitative assessment of the immunological status of each cancer lesion within a patient.

In 2019, ImaginAb initiated a Phase II clinical trial investigating the utility of Zr-89 IAB22M2C to image CD8 T-cells before and after metastatic cancer patients receive immunotherapy-based treatment. The trial is also to measure changes in CD8+ T-cell distribution before and after immuno-oncology treatment.

Fosun Pharma Licenses Immuno-Oncology Asset From Verimmune

Shanghai Fosun Pharmaceutical (Group) Co., Ltd. licensed an anti-tumor immune redirection candidate, which it calls a new modality for immuno-oncology, from US firm Verimmune on 19 May. The Baltimore biotech gets $2m up front under the deal and could earn up to $123m in development, regulatory and sales milestones, as well as potential net sales royalties.

Fosun Pharma gets rights in greater China to develop, import and commercialize VERI-101, derived from Verimmune's Anti-tumor Immune Redirection Virus-inspired Particle (AIR-ViP) technology platform to redirect natural, pre-existing immunity from past viral infections or childhood vaccinations to target cancer.

Chia Tai-Tianqing Picks Up LAG3 Antibody From Symphogen

Chia Tai Tianqing Pharmaceutical Group Co., Ltd., a subsidiary of Hong Kong-listed *Sino Biopharmaceutical Limited*, struck a deal with *Symphogen A/S* on 18 May conferring global rights to anti-LAG3 candidate Sym022. Symphogen gets an undisclosed purchase payment and can earn sales-based milestones.

Sym022 has shown good safety and tolerability as a monotherapy and in combination with other checkpoint inhibitors in two Phase I clinical trials, the companies said. CTTQ said the candidate will strengthen its oncology pipeline and expand its combination therapy options with its pipeline candidates, which include the multi-target tyrosine kinase inhibitor anlotinib, anti-PD-1 agent penpulimab, anti-PD-L1 candidate TQB2450 and anti-TIM3 inhibitor TQB2618.

Cala Partners With SK Biopharm In Neurology

Bioelectronic medicine firm *Cala Health, Inc.* announced an investment and potential

collaboration with *SK Biopharmaceuticals Co., Ltd*. and its parent company SK Inc. on 18 May to fuel innovation in neurology indications. This partnership marks the first time SK Biopharmaceuticals has invested in the US, according to the companies.

Cala said the agreement will further solidify it as a leader in bioelectronic medicine. In the past year, Cala has expanded its commercial executive leadership team, achieved numerous reimbursement milestones, announced multiple clinical research studies validating the efficacy of Cala TAPS therapy, and closed a $77m series D fundraising. (Also see "*Cala Health Hopes To Jolt Essential Tremor Market With Wrist-Worn Non-Invasive Stimulation*" - Medtech Insight, 18 Nov, 2021.)

F2G Licenses Rights To Shionogi For Olorofim In Europe And Asia

Shionogi & Co. Ltd. and *F2G Ltd*. announced a license agreement on 16 May for F2G's new oral antifungal agent olorofim. Under the deal, Shionogi gets development and commercialization rights for olorofim in both Europe and Asia. Shionogi is paying $100m up front, with F2G eligible to earn up to $380m in regulatory and commercial milestones as well as tiered sales royalties.

Manchester, UK-based F2G developed olorofim to treat invasive aspergillosis and other rare mold infections, obtaining orphan drug status from the European Medicines Agency for the treatment of invasive aspergillosis and invasive scedosporiosis, as well as breakthrough therapy designation for multiple indications by the US Food and Drug Administration.

Shionogi said the two firms will also collaborate on a planned Phase III trial with the drug in invasive aspergillosis patients who are resistant to azole antifungal therapy. F2G, which operates in Austria as well as the UK, raised $60.8m in 2020 to help fund development of olorofim. (Also see "*Antifungal Specialist F2G Gets Near $61m Financing*" - Scrip, 12 Aug, 2020.)

Stay tuned for the next edition of Asia Deal Watch. You can read more about other Asia deals that have been covered in depth by Scrip and Generics Bulletin in recent days below:

(Also see "*Torrent Acquires Chronic Brands From Dr. Reddy's, Folds Up US Liquids Business*" - Scrip, 27 May, 2022.)	Torrent is recalibrating strategy with the addition of chronic therapies from Dr. Reddy's while it folds up an unsustainable liquids business in US. The latter resulted in the company reporting a Q4 loss but a timely bonus share issue propped up investor sentiment.
(Also see "*Henlius Brings In Abbott As Another Partner In Brazil*" - Generics Bulletin, 26 May, 2022.)	Chinese player Shanghai Henlius Biotech has out licensed semi-exclusive rights to some of its biosimilars in Brazil again, shortly after

	signing a major deal covering 16 Latin American countries.
(Also see "*High Hopes For Heidelberg Pharma With Huadong Onboard*" - Scrip, 25 May, 2022.)	CEO Jan Schmidt-Brand tells *Scrip* that with another reliable long-term investor on the team alongside major shareholder Dievini, Heidelberg is well positioned to advance its amanitin-targeted antibody-drug conjugate candidates.
(Also see "*IFC And Nippon Chemiphar Ally In Asia, Middle East And Africa*" - Generics Bulletin, 17 May, 2022.)	Japan's Nippon Chemiphar and the International Finance Corporation have announced an alliance that will see the pair collaborate to boost local production of generics in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, as part of efforts to reduce reliance on imports.