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Eisai And Eli Lilly Triumph At The 19th Annual Scrip Awards

Winners Announced In London Last Night

by **Scrip Team**

Eisai and Lilly were the biggest winners at the 19th Annual Scrip Awards in a glittering ceremony at the Dorchester in London's Mayfair, hosted by the actor and comedian Jon Culshaw.

The pharma, biotech and allied industries came together in London on 16 November to celebrate a year of exceptional achievement at the 19th Annual Scrip Awards. It was an occasion to applaud a wide spectrum of achievements across the biopharma ecosystem with awards that recognized the accomplishments of commercial-stage pharma companies, R&D-focused biotech firms and clinical research organisations alike.

Amid a downturn in investment in the biopharma space, there was still plenty to celebrate. Advances have continued apace not just in the huge oncology space but also in obesity and Alzheimer's disease that have captured public interest in the industry beyond COVID-19.

The 15 Scrip Awards categories range from those that recognize the broader achievements of companies, to those for innovation in deal making, advances in R&D and the more personal accomplishments of teams and individuals.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Lifetime Achievement Award (sponsored by ICON), to Jeremy Levin, while [Eisai Co., Ltd.](#) enjoyed a good evening, taking home the trophies for Best New Drug and Clinical Advance of the Year for its novel Alzheimer's therapy Leqembi (lecanemab), co-commercialized and co-promoted with [Biogen, Inc.](#)

[Eli Lilly and Company](#) won the Pharma Company of the Year Award (sponsored by Parexel) having enjoyed a successful year on many fronts.

Sales of its diabetes therapy, Mounjaro (tirzepatide), have grown at such a pace that the drug became the firm's third-best selling drug within a year of its launch – a trajectory that is set to accelerate following its recent approval in the US for weight loss as Zepbound.

Its R&D pipeline is making waves not just in the increasingly competitive field of cardiometabolic disease, where successors to Mounjaro are showing great promise, but also in the burgeoning Alzheimer's market, where its novel product donanemab awaits approval.

And the firm has been active in dealmaking, with three recent billion-dollar-plus acquisitions of [*POINT Biopharma Global Inc.*](#), [*Versanis Bio*](#) and [*DICE Therapeutics, Inc.*](#) to bolster its positions in radiopharmaceuticals, metabolic and inflammatory diseases.

WuXi's Biotech Company of the Year Award (sponsored by WuXi AppTec) went to [*MoonLake Immunotherapeutics AG*](#).

The last year has been transformational for MoonLake with landmark clinical trial results followed by a substantial fundraising. The MIRA Phase II trial of sonelokimab, its nanobody for the treatment of inflammation, reported positive top-line results in hidradenitis suppurativa. MoonLake later raised \$400m in an upsized offering to help fund the continued development of sonelokimab, making it the largest European fundraising in Q2 2023.

Other categories that reward the achievements of firms over the qualifying 12 months include those acknowledging the critical role that CROs play in drug development.

The trophy for Best Contract Research Organization - Specialist Providers went to CluePoints.

CluePoints has been at the forefront of eClinical technology innovation for over a decade, leading the industry in risk-based monitoring and quality management. CluePoints uses its expertise in algorithm-driven data analytics to improve the automation of key processes and the interrogation and interpretation of data and to bring a risk-based philosophy to several other clinical trial processes.

The judges said CluePoints provided “powerful solutions that can be applied across the industry.”

For Best Contract Research Organization - Full-Service Providers, the judges chose [*Parexel International Corp.*](#), after a tight competition.

As the industry emerged from the pandemic, customers faced new macroeconomic challenges. Parexel continued to evolve and meet customers' needs with its patient-first focus, creating new sites and recruitment models and expanding capabilities in Asia-Pacific, while becoming the first

top CRO to appoint a chief patient officer and patient ambassador. The judges were impressed with the range of examples of successful delivery given by the CRO.

Working Together

Turning to those awards that recognize the many ways in which biopharma firms work with each other and the wider world, the trophy for Licensing Deal of the Year went to [*Nimbus Therapeutics, Inc.*](#) and [*Takeda Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd.*](#) for the worldwide development and commercialization of TAK-279.

Nimbus's sale of its clinical-stage selective TYK2 inhibitor to Takeda, announced in December 2022, garnered the firm an upfront payment of \$4bn, with up to \$2bn in additional commercial milestones, making it one of the largest biotech transactions in recent memory. TAK-279 augments Takeda's portfolio of programs for immune-mediated diseases – it has since shown best-in-class potential following promising Phase IIb data in psoriasis – and will benefit from the major's clinical and regulatory reach. The judges said the “remarkable” deal would also be transformational for Nimbus.

In another tight category, the Quris Best Partnership Alliance Award (sponsored by Quris AI) was this year awarded to [*AstraZeneca PLC*](#) with [*Quell Therapeutics Limited*](#) for the research, global development and commercialization of T-regulatory (Treg) cell therapies in type 1 diabetes and inflammatory bowel disease.

Treg cell therapy is a unique approach to treat autoimmune diseases by inducing localised immune tolerance through the immune suppressive properties of targeted Treg cells. Quell's proprietary platform to stabilize Treg cells offers the potential to provide durability beyond that seen with other approaches. The firm's manufacturing expertise and regulatory experience with its lead Treg asset makes Quell a strong fit with AstraZeneca's disease area expertise and extensive R&D and commercial capabilities. “A partnership that makes total sense,” commented the judges.

The judges deemed [*Gilead Sciences, Inc.*](#) and the Elton John AIDS Foundation's RADIANT partnership as this year's Community Partnership Of The Year.

Gilead Sciences partnered with the Elton John AIDS Foundation to establish RADIANT, a five-year, \$25m partnership to help halt new cases of HIV, prevent AIDS-related deaths and reduce HIV-related stigma in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the only region in the world where both new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths are increasing. RADIANT is community-driven, putting decisions around program strategy and implementation into the hands of the people and communities most affected by HIV to ensure projects will be tailored to local needs.

“The progress that RADIANT grantees have made outstrips even the most optimistic projections,”

said the judges.

Research & Development Matters

All stages of R&D are recognized by the Scrip Awards categories, and this year a new category was introduced specifically to applaud ingenuity in cancer drug research with the Best Oncology R&D Advance Award.

This went to [*AffyImmune Therapeutics, Inc.*](#)'s AIC100 ICAM-1 targeting CAR T cell therapy. AffyImmune is applying its Tune & Track technology to the development of CAR-T cell therapies for solid tumors that are more effective, have less on-target, off-tumor toxicity and are trackable within the body. At the 2023 ASCO meeting, AffyImmune presented positive safety and early efficacy results from its US-based Phase I study for AIC100, an ICAM-1 targeting CAR-T cell therapy, including an unprecedented partial response in a patient with anaplastic thyroid cancer.

The judges described it as a “platform with a strong promise to broaden application of presently limited therapeutic tools.”

MSD's Innovation Award (sponsored by MSD), which looks more broadly at early-stage R&D advances went to [*Quris-AI Closes the Clinical Prediction Gap.*](#)

The [*Quris BioAI*](#) platform is the first AI clinical-prediction platform that simulates clinical trials and a real human body's reaction to drugs by leveraging a patented organ-on-chip-system through the use of stem-cell-derived tissue and AI to effectively predict drug toxicity. It better predicts which drug candidates will safely work in humans and helps pharma companies avoid the risks and costs of failed clinical trials and end the reliance on ineffective animal testing. This brings down the cost to consumers and accelerates speed to market. The judges said it had the potential to transform R&D.

Further along the R&D pipeline, the Clinical Advance Of The Year (sponsored by Bioforum) prize went to [*Eisai's Phase III Clarity AD study of Leqembi in early Alzheimer's disease.*](#)

Clarity AD was the first clinical trial to show that a drug could reduce the rate of disease progression and slow cognitive and functional decline in adults with Alzheimer's disease and paved the way for the full US approval of Leqembi. The beta-amyloid targeting drug reduced clinical decline by 27% at 18 months compared with placebo. The trial's eligibility criteria included patients with a broad range of comorbidities/comedications and included a mix of racial and ethnic groups.

Despite some tough competition, the judges also awarded the Best New Drug Award to Leqembi. The humanized IgG1 monoclonal antibody targets and clears the most neurotoxic form of amyloid beta that continuously accumulates as well as removes the existing plaques to treat the

progressive, chronic disease.

“After many years of failure in developing medicines for AD, Leqembi looks to be a major breakthrough,” said the judges.

People And Teams

The biotech and pharma industries would be nothing without the people they employ and a number of Scrip Awards categories seek to reward both individual and team performance over the qualifying year.

The Business Development Team Of The Year trophy went to [Ipsen SA](#). Ipsen’s partnering team has undergone a transformation following an organizational shift in 2021 to focus on delivering the company’s external innovation strategy and expand its pipeline. Since 2021, the team has expanded Ipsen’s portfolio with over 20 best-, or first-in-class programs in oncology, rare diseases and neuroscience, including the acquisition of Albireo. This deal, for a total consideration up to almost \$1.2bn, expanded Ipsen’s expertise in rare liver diseases and was its second acquisition in nine months.

“A busy year,” commented the judges. “Ipsen’s BD team has done an excellent job of accelerating the deals with deep insights and a powerful cross-functional team.”

David Zaccardelli, president and CEO of [Verona Pharma plc](#), was named as this year’s Executive Of The Year – Developmental-Stage Companies (sponsored by Dalriada).

Zaccardelli has transformed Verona from a small biotech with a market cap of around \$75m at the time of his appointment in February 2020, to a firm worth around \$1.6bn with a first-in-class therapeutic, ensifentrine, submitted for US approval in COPD. Verona secured access to up to \$300m in funding, giving it a financial runway until at least the end of 2025, including the potential commercial launch of ensifentrine. Verona was also the best performing biotech small cap in 2022, following a 289% increase in its share price.

“Zaccardelli is a well-rounded commercial leader who has a clear understanding and successfully navigating the drug discovery pathway ... His commercial acumen will definitely place Verona Pharma in a leading position in the future,” the judges said.

The award for Executive of the Year – Commercial-Stage Companies (sponsored by Dalriada) went to [Sanofi](#) CEO Paul Hudson.

Since joining the company as CEO in 2019, Hudson has been reshaping Sanofi into a modern healthcare company with the ambition to transform the practice of medicine, by focusing on growth, innovation, efficiency and cultural change. Hudson’s vision to make Sanofi a science-

driven company is fueling a pipeline focused almost exclusively on developing first and best-in-class medicines, while also positioning Sanofi to become the first pharma company powered by AI at scale.

“Hudson with his successful track record in Novartis and AstraZeneca has brought in a sea-change to the culture of the organization to be modern and dynamic and playing to win. His investment in digital technologies particularly in drug discovery is noteworthy. Kudos to him for deprioritizing non-strategic product portfolios and focusing on initiatives that have long-term impact,” said the judges. “Hudson has definitely brought in fresh air of a contemporary leadership style to the company.” He also “received extra bonus points as a non-Francophone CEO of a very French company.”

Lifetime Achievement Award

But the night belonged to Jeremy Levin, this year’s Lifetime Achievement Award winner.

For 30 years, Levin served as a physician, biotech venture capitalist, biotech entrepreneur, chair of the board of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization, and executive leader of both large and small biopharmaceutical companies.

Truly international, he was born in South Africa, moved during childhood with his family to the UK, and after gaining degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge universities, practised medicine in London, Cape Town and Geneva.

He then went to America to join the budding biotech industry, where he worked under Henri Termeer at Genzyme. He advanced into global C-suite level roles at [Novartis AG](#) and [Bristol Myers Squibb Company](#), before becoming CEO of [Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd.](#)

Throughout his career, Levin has shown a knack for finding emerging innovations that have unlocked new therapeutic areas. He staked his job on the acquisition of Medarex by Bristol Myers Squibb in the early 2000s – a deal that ultimately led to the launch of the first checkpoint inhibitor Opdivo (nivolumab). At BMS, he implemented the ‘String of Pearls’ strategy to complement internal R&D with external innovation – now a standard for how large pharmas interact with biotechs.

He also saw the promise of RNA therapeutics and was among the first to invest in companies like [Alnylam Pharmaceuticals Inc.](#), and today, he is seeking to crack open another field – neuroscience. In 2014, he used his own money to found [Ovid Therapeutics, Inc.](#) to develop medicines for rare brain diseases.

Levin has led his peers and politicians to take a stand on matters affecting the health and the future of society. As the chair of BIO, he helped the industry establish vaccine standards for

COVID-19 so that politics did not interfere with safety.

He has defended at the highest levels the contributions of immigrants to American medical science, and led industry's response to humanitarian crises around the world. He is also a leading voice in access to medicines, co-authoring the Biotech Social Pact for responsible pricing in Europe.

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