

Thursday 28 January, 2016

CRT ANNOUNCES LICENSE AGREEMENT WITH MSD TO DEVELOP INHIBITORS OF PRMT5 FOR CANCER AND BLOOD DISORDERS

CANCER RESEARCH TECHNOLOGY (CRT) – the development and commercialisation arm of Cancer Research UK – has today (Thursday) entered into a license agreement with MSD, known as Merck in the US and Canada, to develop inhibitors of protein arginine methyltransferase 5 (PRMT5).

These promising new drugs, which potentially have clinical applications in both cancer and non-cancer blood disorders, have been developed by the Australian Cooperative Research Centre for Cancer Therapeutics (CTx) with support from the Wellcome Trust and CRT.

CRT has licensed rights to MSD on behalf of CTx – a Melbourne based CRC focused on the discovery and development of novel therapies for cancer. The program is the result of initial research by Professor Stephen Jane at Monash University and collaboration between the CTx academic partners.

The PRMT5 protein is involved in many cellular processes including the epigenetic control of genes such as p53 – a gene that protects the cell against cancer-causing mutations and is faulty in nine out of ten cancers. High levels of PRMT5 protein are found in mantle cell lymphoma (MCL), chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL), melanoma, lung and breast cancers and are linked to poor survival.

In addition to applications for cancer, PRMT5 inhibitors switch on important genes in the development of blood, which could provide disease-modifying treatment options for patients with blood disorders like sickle cell disease and beta thalassemia.

Dr Ian Street, CTx chief scientific officer, said: “We are delighted to be working with CRT and MSD to progress the PRMT5 program to the clinic. This is why CTx was established, to leverage cutting edge research developed by Australian scientists and ensure that this knowledge is translated for the benefit of patients.”

Under the terms of the license, MSD will be responsible for research and development, including clinical development, and for worldwide commercialisation of products. As part of the research and development activities, MSD has entered into a research collaboration with CTx focusing on blood disorders, which MSD will fund.

CRT will receive an upfront payment of US\$15 million (around £10.5 million) and is eligible to receive potential payments of up to US\$0.5 billion (around £0.35 billion) for achievement of development, regulatory and commercialisation milestones. In addition, the agreement provides for royalties on sales. All payments will be shared between CRT, CTx and the Wellcome Trust with the majority being returned to CTx and its Australian research partners.

Dr Phil L’Huillier, Cancer Research Technology’s director of business development, said: “We’re delighted to have brought together the multiple parties involved in the discovery and optimisation of this multi-purpose target and to have established this major license agreement. The deal provides potentially significant financial returns, which CRT will invest into life-saving cancer research, and

most importantly will hopefully bring promising new drugs to cancer patients as well as those suffering from blood disorders where there are no effective treatment options available.”

Dr Warwick Tong, CTx chief executive, said: “This is a great result for Australian science and the CRC Programme as a whole and further demonstrates what can be achieved when science and commercialisation capabilities unite.”

Dr Richard Seabrook, head of business development at the Wellcome Trust, said: “We’re excited to see that the support from our Seeding Drug Discovery Award is playing a key role in moving the project forward. We hope that in time the collaboration will lead to the development of effective new treatments for haemoglobin disorders such as sickle cell and beta thalassaemia, both of which are associated with significant illness and early mortality.”

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Notes to editor:

About Cancer Therapeutics CRC

Cancer Therapeutics CRC (CTx) is in the business of finding cures for cancer. Founded in 2007 and funded by the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) Programme, CTx is collaborative partnership of leading Research Institutes, Universities and biotechnology companies that translates Australia’s innovative research discoveries into new cancer drugs ready for clinical development. In particular it is targeting novel cancer pathways associated with the process of metastasis and children’s cancers. Further information about CTx can be found at www.cancercrc.com

The CRC Programme supports industry led end-user driven research collaborations to address the major challenges facing Australia. Australia’s network of CRCs operates across all sectors of Australia’s economy and society. Further information about the CRC Programme is available www.business.gov.au

About The Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to improving health. We support bright minds in science, the humanities and the social sciences, as well as education, public engagement and the application of research to medicine. Our investment portfolio gives us the independence to support such transformative work as the sequencing and understanding of the human genome, research that established front-line drugs for malaria, and Wellcome Collection, our free venue for the incurably curious that explores medicine, life and art. www.wellcome.ac.uk

About Cancer Research Technology

Cancer Research Technology (CRT) is a specialist commercialisation and development company, which aims to develop new discoveries in cancer research for the benefit of cancer patients. CRT

works closely with leading international cancer scientists and their institutes to protect intellectual property arising from their research and to establish links with commercial partners. CRT facilitates the discovery, development and marketing of new cancer therapeutics, vaccines, diagnostics and enabling technologies. CRT is a wholly owned subsidiary of Cancer Research UK, the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. Further information about CRT can be found at www.cancertechnology.com and about Cancer Research UK at www.cancerresearchuk.org.