

Monday 2 March, 2009

## **NEW DEAL BOOSTS DEVELOPMENT OF TARGETING PEPTIDES IN NANOTECHNOLOGY**

Cancer Research Technology Limited (CRT), the oncology-focused development and commercialisation company, and the newly established oncology therapeutics company Aura Biosciences have agreed to take a promising new set of peptides into development for use in targeting cancer. The move marks significant extra investment in a potential treatment which will use these peptides to target cancer cells with RNAi or drug-loaded nanoparticles.

This deal will further the development of scientific work carried out by Cancer Research UK and DebRA - a charity which works on behalf of people in the UK with the genetic skin blistering condition Epidermolysis Bullosa (EB). Researchers developed short peptides that bind strongly to the protein called integrin  $\alpha v \beta 6^*$ , a cell-surface protein that is over expressed in a wide range of cancers but is not present at high levels in normal healthy tissue. The strong presence of integrin  $\alpha v \beta 6$  has been shown to be an indicator of a more aggressive tumours and poorer prognosis for cancer patients in breast cancer and in other tumours.

Dr John Marshall from Queen Mary, University of London - who will lead the study on these peptides said: "We are delighted to be joining forces with Aura Biosciences to develop this technology. We believe it has great potential to target and deliver a therapy to many tumours which over-expresses integrin  $\alpha v \beta 6$ . This is supported by a wide body of literature showing that integrin  $\alpha v \beta 6$  is expressed at high levels in many different cancer types, including some of the cancers which currently have limited treatment options available for them such as pancreatic and head and neck cancer."

The terms of this deal will allow for the scientists at Queen Mary to continue to develop the peptides through a new research evaluation programme, sponsored by and run in collaboration with Aura Biosciences.

Under the terms of the agreement, Aura Biosciences will make payments to CRT in exchange for an option to take an exclusive worldwide licence on the peptides for certain applications - on pre-agreed financial terms which include an upfront fee, development milestones and royalties on future sales. Aura Biosciences will fund and oversee the next stage of the evaluation work. CRT will retain rights to the peptides in all other fields of use.

Dr Elisabet de los Pinos, chief executive officer of Aura Biosciences said: “We are very pleased to be progressing this research as we believe the peptides have exciting potential in combination with our proprietary nanoparticle technology already developed. We hope this collaboration will help us provide a unique way to target our nanoparticles to tumour sites more specifically.”

Dr Phil L’Huillier, CRT’s director of business management said: “This deal will enable the development of technology which we hope will one day allow doctors to use these peptides to deliver drug-loaded particles directly to the tumour, reducing the side effects often associated with standard therapies and improving how well they work.”

**Notes to Editors:**

\* Integrins are a large family of different proteins found on the surface of almost all cells in the body. In addition to helping cells stick to the matrix around them like Velcro, they also help cells to move and invade surrounding tissue.