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News

Aust in Roche pan-tumour deal 15.07.2020

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Roche has inked a deal worth up to US$1.7 billion with Blueprint Medicines that could bring a new cancer drug targeting a specific mutation to Australia.

The Swiss pharma giant announced the agreement this week, giving it rights to promising cancer drug pralsetinib in countries outside of the US, which include the local territory.

The drug targets tumours with RET-activating fusions and mutations, which are "key disease drivers" in cancer types including non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), thyroid cancer, and other solid tumours, the company said.

The candidate will join Roche's portfolio of cancer blockbusters, which include **Alecensa, Rozlytrek, Tecentriq, Avastin** and **Tarceva** - all of which have been approved in Australia.

Pralsetinib has already been filed to the FDA and EMA for approval as a NSCLC treatment, suggesting the drug will likely also be filed here in the next 18 months, if it has not been already.

The newcomer also has "tumour-agnostic potential", according to Roche, suggesting it may be taken down a similar route to Rozlytrek, with hopes wider access to genomic testing will enable it to be reimbursed as a pan-tumour therapy.

"We are very excited to enter into this collaboration with Blueprint Medicines, a partner we have already been working with for four years, with the goal of bringing a potentially transformative treatment option to patients with rare RET-altered cancers as quickly as possible," Roche's head of pharma partnering James Sabry said.

"In bringing pralsetinib to patients, we will leverage our global reach and expertise in oncology, as well as our capabilities in diagnostics and the use of real-world data toward our aim of providing personalised treatments for patients."

Local biotechs hit milestones

Local biotech Imugene will begin the first human trials for its checkpoint inhibitor PD1-Vaxx for treatment of non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC).

The Sydney-based biotech announced the phase 1 study will be conducted in Australia after it received ethics approval for the trials to go ahead.

"The start of our Australian study is a significant milestone for Imugene and clinicians treating Australians faced with the challenge of lung cancer," Imugene CEO Leslie Chong said.

"Accomplishing this goal speaks to the perserverance and dedication of Imugene's clinical and research team as we continue to build on our clinical and commercial potential."

Meanwhile another local biotech, Pharmaxis, has received orphan drug designation for its LOX inhibitor PXS-5505 for treatment of myelofibrosis.

Pharmaxis CEO Gary Phillips said the company was "very pleased" with the designation, adding there was a high unmet need for myelofibrosis therapies.

"We expect to file an investigational new drug (IND) application with the FDA shortly and will provide an update on clinical trial plans at that time," he said.

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