MAX PLANCK SOCIETY

Press Release

News W / B / 2010 (238) October 18th, 2010

Collaboration and Option Agreement in diabetes research

Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry and GlaxoSmithKline enter a research collaboration to develop novel type II diabetes treatments

The Max Planck Institute (MPI) of Biochemistry in Martinsried and pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), have signed a research collaboration agreement on the development of novel medicines for the treatment of type II diabetes. The option-based, risk sharing agreement, negotiated with the help of technology transfer organisation Max Planck Innovation, involves payments to MPI worth up to several million Euros over a three-year period.

The Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry and the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline have signed a research agreement.

Image: Monika Krause, MPI of Biochemistry

In the collaborative project with GSK, MPI scientists will be identifying and developing novel compounds that can inhibit kinase activity linked to type II diabetes and control it in a targeted manner. MPI will carry out all in vitro and in vivo work to develop novel therapeutics for treating type 2 diabetes. The alliance is established through GSK's Centre of Excellence for External Drug Discovery (ceedd), which seeks to collaborate with world class entities at the leading edge of highly innovative and transformative science.

Axel Ullrich, Director at the MPI of Biochemistry and fellow scientist Mathias Bäcker have previously described the role of certain kinases in connection with

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ISSN 0170-4656

the development of type II diabetes, a disease in which insulin resistance gives rise to a raised blood sugar level. These kinase proteins make up a group of important signal molecules in the body, which can, under certain circumstances, be involved in the development or manifestation of the disease.

Under the Agreement, GSK has an exclusive option throughout the three-year term to exclusively license novel compounds and IP resulting from the program and to take on responsibility for the development of such compounds through clinical studies and for worldwide commercialization.

Axel Ullrich already achieved a milestone in the treatment of diabetes back in 1977, together with fellow scientists at the University of California. At that time, he developed a method of transferring a copy of the human insulin gene into bacteria. This facilitated the industrial manufacture of human insulin for the very first time and has since made it easier for millions of diabetics to live with the disease, as they no longer have to depend on animal insulin, which is nearly as well tolerated by the body.

Axel Ullrich's current research is set to contribute to the successful treatment of diabetes a second time. "Developing innovative drugs to treat diabetes gives us the opportunity to directly influence defects in the molecular signalling paths, which lead to diabetes. That enables us to fight the actual causes of diabetes," says Ullrich.

Peter Gruss, President of the Max Planck Society expressed his delight with the research collaboration agreement: "GlaxoSmithKline is one of the world's five major pharmaceutical companies. The collaboration agreement with GSK demonstrates that Max Planck Institutes, due to their leading edge in basic research, are also sought-after alliance partners in industry. Max Planck researchers develop novel scientific concepts for industrial applications. We hope that together with a strong alliance partner, we will be able to translate fundamental research discoveries into novel therapies which will improve the quality of life of patients."

Prof Ullrich's longstanding expertise in molecular biology research is again being put to good use, having already resulted in some very successful therapeutic agents. For example, Herceptin®, a drug he developed, is successfully used to treat metastasised breast cancer. The drug Sunitinib, which treats malignant tumours in the gastrointestinal tract (GIST) and renal cancer (RCC) is also based on Ullrich's research work. In the case of both of the above drugs, the suppression of certain kinase activity with suitable inhibitors is central to the treatment.

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About Max Planck Innovation
Max Planck Innovation GmbH markets patents and technologies to industry and advises scientists on setting up new companies on the basis of research results achieved by Max Planck institutes.

Each year, Max Planck Innovation evaluates some 150 inventions, about half of which ultimately lead to patent applications. It has been involved with just under 3,200 inventions since 1979 and concluded almost 1,900 exploitation agreements. The company has also supported nearly 90 successful spin-offs since the early 1990s.

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[1] About GlaxoSmithKline GmbH & Co. KG

[2] About the Max Planck Society

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