Glaxo Wellcome announced that it has been given approval by the European Commission to market Zeffix (lamivudine) in all 15 countries of the European Union. Zeffix is the first effective oral treatment for chronic hepatitis B patients. Zeffix is already available in a number of countries such as the US (as Epivir-HBV), Canada (as Heptovir) and South Korea and has been approved and is awaiting its launching in others such as China. Lamivudine was discovered by BioChem Pharma of Laval, Quebec, Canada and licensed to Glaxo (now Glaxo Wellcome) in 1990.

Zeffix is indicated for the treatment of adult patients with chronic hepatitis B and who have evidence of viral replication. Besides reducing liver inflammation significantly, it has been shown in clinical trials to produce, after three years of continued treatment, seroconversion rates of 65 percent in patients with active liver disease and 40 percent in the overall patient group. Seroconversion rate refers to the rate of loss of the hepatitis B virus antigen and gain of antibodies against the virus in the blood and it is an indicator of long-lasting improvement of the disease. According to World Health Organisation data, an estimated 350 million people around the world are long-term (chronic) carriers of the hepatitis B virus and this includes an estimated four million people in the European Union.

Glaxo Wellcome is a research-based company committed to fighting disease by bringing innovative medicines and services to patients throughout the world and to the healthcare providers that serve them. In 1998, the company invested a total of £1.2 billion (US$1.9 billion) in R&D. Glaxo Wellcome has a broad range of antiviral medicines and Zeffix, Heptovir and Epivir-HBV are trademarks of the Glaxo Wellcome group of companies.

Procter & Gamble (Guangzhou) to Acquire its Chinese Shares

Procter & Gamble (P&G) (Guangzhou) will be acquiring six percent shares from its Chinese partners and make the venture a wholly foreign-funded enterprise. Negotiations on the share transfer is expected to be completed soon.

P&G (Guangzhou) was set up in 1988 by the Guangzhou Soap Factory and the Import and Export Trade Corporation for Construction of Guangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone, the P&G Co. Ltd based in the US and a company based in Hong Kong. P&G (Guangzhou) has been growing rapidly over the years to make it to one of the top joint ventures in China. In 1998, with a sales value of US$583.8 million, profits of US$243.2 million and total assets of US$507.1 million, it emerged as the tenth largest Sino-foreign joint venture enterprise in China.
New Groundbreaking Technique in Genetic Engineering

It is now possible to produce human proteins economically and in potentially unlimited quantities.

PPL Therapeutics, a world-leading biopharmaceutical company, has promised the above with their cutting edge technology in genetic engineering.

Gene targeting is the technique developed (and patented) by PPL which allows replacement of a targeted gene with another at a specific location on the chromosome. Offspring carrying the desired changes are then produced from these cells using nuclear transfer.

Dr. Ron James, Managing Director of PPL, said in a press release, “The real importance ... lies in the potential application of the technique to provide PPL with therapeutic products for clinical trials more quickly and with more certainty.”

With this new technology, PPL is now able to replace the bovine version of serum albumin with the human equivalent. This will lead to cost-effective production of human serum albumin (used in the treatment of burns and other traumatic injuries) in the milk of cows.

Gene targeting can also be used to inactivate (“switch-off”) genes. Xenotransplantation is one such area where the inactivation of a specific gene could lead to pig organs being more readily accepted by the human immune system, allowing transplantation of animal organs to take place where human organs are unavailable.

PPL also hopes to earn royalties by licensing this technique to third parties such as drug companies and livestock breeders.

Fujisawa Healthcare and Discovery Therapeutics Sign Agreement to Develop Cardiovascular Drug

Fujisawa Healthcare, Inc. and Discovery Therapeutics, Inc. (DTI) have recently signed an agreement to develop the injectible form of DTI’s selective adenosine A_1 agonist, DTI-0009, to treat cardiac conditions associated with abnormally high heart rates. The agreement provides Fujisawa with exclusive North American development and marketing rights to an injectible formulation of DTI’s adenosine-based A_1 agonist for the treatment of paroxysmal supraventricular tachycardia (PSVT) and for rate control in atrial fibrillation and atrial flutter. Fujisawa will also have exclusive marketing and promotion rights in the US and Canada to all other injectible indications developed by Fujisawa for this compound and certain back-up compounds. DTI retains foreign rights to the injectible products and intends worldwide development of an oral product for chronic treatment of atrial fibrillation.

Fujisawa Healthcare, Inc., headquartered in Deerfield, Illinois, is a subsidiary of Fujisawa Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd., based in Osaka, Japan. It develops, manufactures, and markets proprietary pharmaceutical products in the US and abroad. The chairman and CEO of Fujisawa Healthcare, Inc., Noboru Maeda, said that they are confident that DTI-0009 will further strengthen their already solid presence in the cardiovascular therapeutics market. He also said that they are pleased to have the opportunity to develop and commercialize DTI-0009, which represents the next step in the treatment of PSVT and exhibits breakthrough potential in the treatment of rate control in atrial fibrillation and atrial flutter.

DTI is a privately held, clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company with a broad portfolio of potential therapeutics focused on cardio-renal markets. It has already submitted the Investigational New Drug (IND) application for DTI-0009 with the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It plans to initiate phase I studies for both intravenous and oral dosage forms soon. Donald McAfee, chairman and CEO of DTI, said that DTI is enthusiastic about this agreement with Fujisawa Healthcare because of their proven leadership in the field. He also mentioned that this is a significant collaboration where both companies have development responsibilities.
Another Chiron Flu Vaccine Gains European Approval

Chiron Corporation has recently announced that it has received National Market Authorizations through the Mutual Recognition procedure to market its subunit influenza vaccine, Agrippal®, in most western European countries. In addition to Agrippal®, which is currently marketed in Italy and other countries worldwide, Chiron markets three other flu vaccines: Fluad® in Italy, Begrivac® in Germany, Europe and other countries worldwide and Influpozzi® in Italy.

Fluad® was first introduced in Italy in 1997. It was the first adjuvanted flu vaccine on the market, incorporating Chiron’s proprietary adjuvant, MF59. Adjuvants are used to boost a vaccine’s effectiveness by increasing the body’s immune response. The company has plans to launch a new formulation of Begrivac® in the fall of 1999. It would be introduced as the first preservative-free flu vaccine, which will provide an important benefit to the many individuals sensitive to preservative ingredients.

About Chiron
Chiron Corporation, with its headquarters in Emeryville, California, is a leading biotechnology company that participates in three global healthcare markets — biopharmaceuticals, vaccines and blood testing. The company is applying a broad and integrated scientific approach to the development of innovative products for preventing and treating cancer, infectious diseases and cardio-vascular disease. This approach is supported by research strengths in recombinant proteins, genomics, small molecules, gene therapy and vaccines.

Chiron Vaccines is a global business, based in Europe, dedicated to supplying and developing new vaccine products for adults and children.

Chiron Vaccines’ market presence is strongest in Germany and Italy, where it is a market leader. The company also sells its products to multinational health organizations and local distributors around the world.

According to Heino von Prondzynski, president of Chiron Vaccines, Chiron (as an international market leader in flu vaccines), is committed to building its European vaccines presence. This recent approval to market Agrippal® throughout Europe allows the company to further expand its flu franchise; it gives access to many European markets, and with adequate time before the flu season to fully leverage marketing efforts. Chiron sells the majority of flu vaccines in the second half of the year due to the seasonality of the infection, although in certain countries, advance sales activities may begin earlier.

As part of its commitment to maintaining its technology leadership, Chiron is currently exploring novel production methods intended to further improve the safety and effectiveness of its vaccines. These new methods use cell-culture technology similar to that used by the biotechnology industry to produce therapeutics.