Metabasis Therapeutics Collaborates with Roche to Develop Liver-Targeted Compounds for the Treatment of Hepatitis C

Metabasis Therapeutics announced that it has entered into a two-year research collaboration agreement with Roche to apply Metabasis’ HepDirect® liver-targeting technology to Roche’s proprietary lead nucleosides in order to develop new treatments for hepatitis C virus (HCV).

Under the terms of the agreement, Roche will provide a US$10 million upfront payment. In the event a development candidate is identified, Roche will assume development responsibility, and Metabasis will be eligible to receive up to US$193 million in additional payments upon achievement of predetermined pre-clinical and clinical development events, as well as regulatory and commercialization events for each product. For any marketed products that result from the collaboration, Roche will retain full commercial rights and pay Metabasis a royalty on net sales.

Dr Mark Erion, Metabasis’ chief scientific officer and executive vice-president of research and development, said: “The HepDirect technology has shown significant promise in delivering the activated form of certain antiviral nucleosides to the liver and therefore has the potential to both enhance the antiviral activity of these nucleosides, as well as to lower the effective dose. A partnership with Roche enables Metabasis and Roche to combine their respective strengths in liver-targeting and hepatitis C research with the hope that this combination will lead to a drug candidate for HCV in the near future.”

Dr Ed Baracchini, senior vice-president of business development for Metabasis Therapeutics, said: “We are very pleased to form this alliance with Roche, a global healthcare company that is a leader in the discovery and development of drugs and tests for HCV. Evidence of the ability of our HepDirect technology to target drugs to the liver has been seen with the three internally-generated product candidates that we have put in the clinic that employ this technology. As evidenced by this collaboration, the HepDirect technology platform has garnered considerable attention within the pharmaceutical industry over the past several years. This collaboration is just one of several business development initiatives that we are currently pursuing with respect to Metabasis’ many assets.”
About Hepatitis C
HCV, an infection of the liver from a virus, is a highly infectious and potentially fatal disease contracted through blood and bodily fluid contact. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are more than 170 million people infected with HCV worldwide. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HCV is the most common chronic blood-borne infection in the United States, with annual deaths due to complications from this disease currently around 10,000 and expected to triple by 2010. HCV causes liver inflammation and when the disease becomes chronic, it can lead to scarring of the liver (cirrhosis), liver failure and cancer. Liver failure due to chronic HCV is the leading cause of liver transplantation today.

About Metabasis
Metabasis is a biopharmaceutical company using its proprietary technologies, scientific expertise and unique capabilities for targeting the liver and liver pathways. The company has established a broad pipeline of product candidates and advanced research programs targeting large markets with significant unmet needs. Metabasis’ core area of focus is on the discovery and development of drug candidates to treat metabolic diseases such as hyperlipidemia and diabetes, among others. Although not a core focus of the company, Metabasis has also discovered and developed drug candidates indicated for the treatment of liver diseases such as hepatitis and primary liver cancer, which it now intends to license or partner. All product candidates were developed internally using proprietary technologies.

About Roche
Roche is a leading healthcare company with a broad spectrum of innovative medical solutions. For more than 100 years, they have been active in the discovery and development, manufacturing and marketing of novel healthcare solutions.