

17. December 2009

EUR 400,000 for New Malaria Drug

The Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine (BNI) has received funds of EUR 400,000 from the City of Hamburg for the development of a new anti-malaria drug. In cooperation with the European ScreeningPort, this may represent a crucial step in combating the malaria parasite.

Dr Carsten Wrenger and his team at the BNI have discovered an essential metabolic pathway in malaria parasites that is not present in humans and is therefore an excellent target for new drugs. Specific inhibitors of this pathway will now be sought using high-throughput screening.

‘Many research projects end at this point,’ comments **Prof. Dr Rolf Horstmann**, Chairman of the BNI. ‘However, in the European ScreeningPort, we have a partner that offers an essential technology for developing new drugs based on our results. The situation is particularly urgent in the case of malaria. Every 30 seconds, a child dies of the infection, and experts are very concerned by initial findings indicating that the parasites could be developing resistance to the newest anti-malaria drugs.’

With support from Ascenion, the BNI’s technology transfer partner, a pilot project with European ScreeningPort has been set up. An initial screening of 2,500 compounds has already delivered first promising hits. ‘The view down the microscope was very impressive,’ comment **Meike Johannsen** and **Ann-Kathrin Grützmacher** from Hamburg’s Ministry of Science and Research after a visit to the BNI. ‘It is amazing to see how the growth of the parasites is affected by the addition of certain active agents. Projects such as this demonstrate that Hamburg is one of the leading life science locations in Europe.’

It is still a long way from today’s results to a usable anti-malaria drug, requiring further investments in the double-figure million Euro range. However, the financial support from the City of Hamburg will provide tremendous leverage, enabling the project to reach a stage at which subsequent funding from large foundations, funds and federal funding programmes becomes possible.

‘This is an excellent example of how research, politics and public-private institutions can cooperate in bringing a worthwhile research project to fruition,’ comments **Dr Peter Ruile**, COO of Ascenion. Norgenta North German Life Science Agency was also instrumental in supporting the application for funding from the City of Hamburg.

Contacts:*For the BNI:*

PD Dr. Carsten Wrenger

Tel.: +49 (0)40 42818-344, E-Mail: wrenger@bni-hamburg.de

Biochemische Parasitologie

Bernhard-Nocht-Straße 74, 20359 Hamburg, Germany

For the City of Hamburg:

Ministry of Science and Research

Dr. Meike Johannsen

Tel.: +49 (0)40 42863-2337, E-Mail: meike.johannsen@bwf.hamburg.de

Hamburger Straße 37, 22083 Hamburg, Germany

For Ascenion:

Dr. Peter Ruile, COO

Tel.: +49 (0)89 318814-14, E-Mail: ruile@ascenion.de

Ascenion GmbH, Herzogstr. 64, 80803 München, Germany

For the European ScreeningPort GmbH:

Dr. Mira Grättinger

Tel.: +49 (0)40 56081-470, E-Mail: mira.graettinger@screeningport.de

Schnackenburgallee 114, 22525 Hamburg, Germany

For Norgenta:

Ina Akkerman

Tel.: +49 (0)40 47196-418, E: ina.akkerman@norgenta.de

Falkenried 88, 20251 Hamburg, Germany

About Ascenion

Ascenion GmbH is an IP asset management company focused on the life sciences. Ascenion advises and supports public research institutions with regard to the protection and exploitation of their intellectual property (patents, know-how, materials), and initiates and mediates license agreements between research institutions and industry. The company places particular emphasis on coaching company founders and on active equity management. Ascenion was founded in 2001 as a 100% subsidiary of the Life-Science Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Research and has since acquired 15 research institutes in the Helmholtz and Leibniz Associations, together with the Hanover Medical School and the research institute Twincore as exclusive partners. Ascenion currently markets around 700 technologies on behalf of these institutes, and closes an average of about 70 agreements between research and industry per year. The team has also coached numerous spin-offs through their foundation and early growth and Ascenion holds equity in 19 of these companies.

Ascenion's headquarters are in Munich, with further offices in Berlin, Braunschweig, Hamburg, Hanover and Neuherberg. Further information at www.ascenion.de

About the BNI

The Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine (BNITM) is Germany's largest institution for research, services and training in the field of tropical diseases and emerging infections. Research topics include clinical studies, epidemiology and control of infectious diseases prevalent in tropical environments as well as the biology of the respective pathogens, their reservoirs and vectors. The focus is on malaria, haemorrhagic fevers, tuberculosis and tissue nematodes. To study highly contagious pathogens such as Lassa and Ebola viruses, BNITM is equipped with high-security laboratory of biosafety level 4.

Services of BNITM comprise the laboratory diagnostics of tropical and rare diseases, a close co-operation with the German army as well as consultations of science, industry, politics and the public, which greatly contribute to the national standing of the institute. It functions as the National Reference Centre for tropical pathogens, reference laboratory for SARS-corona virus and WHO Collaborating Centre for haemorrhagic fever viruses.

Teaching activities include a 3-months, full-time course on all aspects of tropical medicine for physicians, further a training programme for in-house PhD students and a number of short-term events of continuing education in topics related to international health.

In a co-operation with the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, BNITM runs the Kumasi Centre for Collaborative Research in Tropical Medicine (KCCR), a research and training centre equipped with modern laboratories, offices, vehicles and guest houses, which, serving as a platform for Ghanaian-international co-operative projects, is open to external research groups. Outstanding scientific achievements of BNITM in recent years include the discovery of the SARS-corona virus and the identification of a previously unrecognised developmental stage of malaria parasites in humans.

Further Information at www.bni-hamburg.de

About European Screening Port GmbH

European ScreeningPort GmbH is a public private partnership which offers fee-for-service small molecule screening to academic institutions.

The European ScreeningPort acting as a service provider enables academic research institutes to access its state-of-the-art screening platform, extensive collection of compounds, sample and data processing capabilities and the in-depth know-how of its international team who have a strong background in the execution of Pharma-scale Hit-finding and Hit-to-Lead drug discovery programs. The European ScreeningPort now has several projects in its portfolio with German, European and Canadian Universities and Institutions. Further information at www.screeningport.com

About Norgenta

Norgenta North German Life Science Agency GmbH is the project and service company of the federal states of Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein. It supports life science activities in North Germany. As part of Life Science North, Norgenta combines, networks and coordinates the life science activities to develop an internationally competitive cluster. The agency networks the skills of businesses, universities, research institutes and hospitals. It initiates and supports innovative projects that help sharpen the region's business and scientific profile. In this way, the know-how of North German universities and research institutes is selectively harnessed to develop and market products. Our goal is to establish the region as a leading location for life sciences nationally and to market it internationally. Further information at: www.norgenta.de