Biotech Daily

Friday February 11, 2011

Daily news on ASX-listed biotechnology companies

*** ASX DOWN, BIOTECH EVEN: ANTISENSE UP 14%; VIRALYTICS DOWN 7%**

*** VIRALYTICS' CAVATAK PRECLINICAL DATA FOR PANCREATIC CANCER**

*** PROGEN PG545 SIGNIFICANTLY INHIBITS METASTASES IN MICE**

*** RESONANCE JUMPS 104.5% ON PFIZER FIBROSCREEN DEAL**

*** ECOBIOTICS FUNDS UQ'S DR CRAIG WILLIAMS FOR RAINFOREST DRUGS**

MARKET REPORT

The Australian stock market was down 0.68 percent on Friday February 11, 2011 with the S&P ASX 200 down 33.5 points to 4880.9 points.

Fourteen of the Biotech Daily Top 40 stocks were up, 13 fell, seven traded unchanged and six were untraded.

Antisense was best, up 0.1 cents or 14.3 percent to 0.8 cents, with 18.8 million shares traded, followed by Genetic Technologies up one cent or 10 percent to 11 cents with one million shares traded.

Benitec and Cellestis climbed more than six percent; Starpharma was up five percent; Immuron and Universal Biosensors were up more than four percent; Nanosonics, Phosphagenics and Virax were up more than three percent; Cochlear and Phylogica rose more than two percent; with Clinuvel and Impedimed up more than one percent.

Viralytics led the falls, down 0.4 cents or 7.1 percent to 5.2 cents with 8.5 million shares traded, followed by QRX down six cents or 4.6 percent to $1.24 with 58,105 shares traded.

Alchemia and Cellmid lost more than three percent; Bionomics, Biota, Cathrx and Chemgenex shed more than two percent; with Circadian, Pharmaxis, Psivida and Sirtex down one percent or more.

VIRALYTICS

Viralytics says that Cavatak (Coxsackievirus A21) may have potential as a treatment for pancreatic cancer.

Viralytics said that a research paper entitled 'Oncolytic activity of Coxsackievirus A21 (Cavatak) in human pancreatic cancer' would be presented by the University of Newcastle's Dr Gough Au at the International Conference on Oncolytic Viruses as Cancer Therapeutics, in Las Vegas, March 16-19, 2011.

Viralytics chief scientific officer Dr Darren Shafren said that preliminary studies indicated that a high proportion of human pancreatic cancers expressed elevated levels of surface ICAM-1 and Cavatak used the ICAM-1 receptor to invade and destroy cancerous cells.

"As such these findings earmark pancreatic cancer as an indication that warrants further investigation in Cavatak studies," Dr Shafren said.

"Initial animal pancreatic tumor studies are now underway" Dr Shafren said.

Viralytics said that current research on human pancreatic cancer strengthened its pipeline of pre-clinical research using Cavatak in multiple myeloma, lung, bladder and primary brain cancers.

The company said the incidence of pancreatic cancer had increased during the past several decades and ranks as the fourth leading cause of cancer death in the US.

Viralytics said that in 2010, the US had an estimated 43,150 new cases and 36,800 deaths from pancreatic cancer.

Pancreatic cancer has the highest mortality rate of all major cancers with 94 percent of patients dying within five years of initial diagnosis and 75 percent of patients died within the first year of diagnosis with only six percent surviving more than five years.

Viralytics fell 0.4 cents or 7.1 percent to 5.2 cents with 8.5 million shares traded.

PROGEN PHARMACEUTICALS

Progen says PG545 shows an overall survival advantage in a mouse model of breast cancer and utility in a number of different tumor types.

Progen said it presented preclinical data on its anti-angiogenic and anti-heparanase inhibitor PG545 at Victoria's Lorne Cancer Conference, February 10, 2011.

Progen's director of preclinical development Dr Keith Dredge said that the presentation would focus on the anti-metastatic and inhibition of solid tumor growth properties of PG545 in a number of tumor models in both in human cells in vitro and in mice.

The company said that PG545 "significantly inhibits metastases and this correlates with overall survival in the 4T1 breast carcinoma model".

"Our findings confirm that PG545 can block the spread of tumor cells to other tissues, in this instance, the lungs," Dr Dredge said.

"Critically, this reduction in metastasis correlates with overall survival and importantly, it appears to differentiate PG545 from other angiogenesis inhibitors such as Nexavar, which is unable to stop the spread of metastasis in this model," Dr Dredge said.

He said that PG545 significantly inhibited metastases in the spontaneous metastasis model of the human colon adeno-carcinoma grade II cell line HT-29 and inhibited spontaneous metastasis from a subcutaneous site to the lung in the Lewis lung carcinoma model.

"We also presented data which confirms PG545 limits the growth of ovarian cancer in mice when given as a single agent or in combination with Taxol, a chemotherapy used for patients with ovarian cancer" said Dr Dredge.

Progen was unchanged at 34 cents.

RESONANCE HEALTH

Resonance jumped 104.5 percent on news that Pfizer will evaluate the company's Fibroscreen magnetic resonance imaging-based product for assessing liver fibrosis.
Resonance managing director Liza Dunne told Biotech Daily that Pfizer would assisting in funding further research, but Resonance fully retained the intellectual property rights to the liver fibrosis test (BD: Sep 15, 2006; Aug 13, 2007).
Resonance said the Pfizer agreement followed the company's announcement last year to seek partners for the next stage of development and Resonance was "delighted that Pfizer has recognized the potential value of the … liver fibrosis test".
Resonance said liver fibrosis was "a major international health problem caused primarily by hepatitis C infection, excessive alcohol consumption and fatty liver disease".
The company said the gold standard for assessing liver fibrosis was a biopsy, a technique presenting pain and risk to the patient and inaccuracies due to sampling error.
Resonance said that an imaging based liver fibrosis test enabled repeat measurements to be made safely and the potential for the earlier detection of liver fibrosis.
Resonance said the Pfizer agreement involved a clinical study in collaboration with the medical director of Melbourne's Austin Hospital liver transplant unit, Prof Peter Angus to assess improvements to achieve a higher level of accuracy in distinguishing between the various stages of liver fibrosis and to compare the results with a liver biopsy fibrosis grade.
The company said results were expected by April 2012, when it would decide whether further research was needed or if regulatory approval for the test should be sought.
Resonance closed up 1.7 cents or 77.3 percent at 3.9 cents with 11 million shares traded.

ECOBIOTICS, UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

Queensland's Ecobiotics will fund University of Queensland scientist Dr Craig Williams for three years to develop medical therapies from ancient rainforest species.
A media release from the University of Queensland's commercialization arm Uniquest said it facilitated the contract extension through its consulting and research division.
Uniquest said Dr Williams had been working with Ecobiotics for six years researching the discovery and development of new chemicals from rainforest plants for use in pharmaceuticals and food additives for humans and animals.
Uniquest said that Ecobiotics and its subsidiary QBiotics had raised $10 million to fund trials of anticancer compound EBC-46 for solid tumors in humans and animals.
Uniquest said that EBC-46 was the first Australian rainforest-derived drug in human trials.
The company said Dr Williams was a researcher and lecturer in the School of Chemistry and Molecular Biosciences and with his chemistry research team and Queensland Institute of Medical Research's Prof Peter Parsons would examine and replicate the chemical composition and structure of plant material supplied by Ecobiotics.
Uniquest said the research involved a high-field 900MHz nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy instrument at the University of Queensland's Centre for Advanced Imaging.
Dr Williams said that working with Ecobiotics was "one of the most rewarding experiences in my career so far".
"As well as being involved personally with the development of potential new treatments for cancer, I have been able to broaden the scope of my scholarly activities with relevant case studies, collaborate with other researchers and publish high-impact and industry-collaborative research," Dr Williams said.