Biotech Daily

Friday April 11, 2025

Daily news on ASX-listed biotechnology companies

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MARKET REPORT

The Australian stock market was down 0.82 percent on Friday April 11, 2025, with the ASX200 down 63.1 points to 7,646.5 points.

Eleven of the Biotech Daily Top 40 companies were up, 20 fell, six traded unchanged and three were untraded. All four Big Caps were down.

Actinogen was the best, up 0.2 cents or 7.1 percent to three cents, with 5.7 million shares traded.

Universal Biosensors climbed 6.8 percent; Curvebeam, Dimerix, EBR and Medical Developments were up more than five percent; Aroa, Prescient and Proteomics rose more than two percent; Medadvisor was up 1.1 percent; with Micro-X up by 0.8 percent.

Mesoblast led the falls, down 16 cents or 9.2 percent to $1.575, with 16.95 million shares traded.

Amplia and Genetic Signatures were down than seven percent; Alcidion lost 6.5 percent; Orthocell was down 5.3 percent; Neuren and Paradigm fell four percent or more; CSL, Nanosonics and Syntara were down more than three percent; Clarity, Clinuvel, Cochlear, Cynata, Impedimed and Polynovo shed more than two percent; 4D Medical, Avita, Cyclopharm, Emvision, Resmed and Telix were down by more than one percent; with Pro Medicus and SDI down by less than one percent.

DR BOREHAM'S CRUCIBLE: NEUREN PHARMACEUTICALS

By TIM BOREHAM

ASX Code: NEU

Share price: $9.19; **Shares on issue:** 127,993,374; **Market cap:** $1.18 billion

Chief executive officer: Jon Pilcher

Board: Patrick Davies (chair), Mr Pilcher, Dianne Angus, Dr Jenny Harry, Joe Basile

Financials (year to December 31, 2024): revenue $227.8 million (down 5.1%), net profit $142 million (down 9.6%), earnings per share $1.0861 (down 9.6%), cash balance $222.2 million (down 2.8%)*

***** Cash now stands at $272.2 million, adjusted for December quarter royalties and the paediatric review voucher sale received in the March 2025 quarter.

Identifiable major holders: Cameron Richard Pty Ltd 3.44%, Stuart Andrew Pty Ltd 2.2%, Essex Castle 1.83% (Milford Asset Management held 5.08% but ceased to be a substantial shareholder in July 2024)

Neuren and its US partner Acadia Pharmaceuticals have been blitzing it with its Rett syndrome drug Daybue (formerly trofinetide), which has exceeded the expectations of two years ago when the drug was approved in the US.

"Achieving $350 million in the first year of sales was more than anyone expected," says Neuren CEO Jon Pilcher.

Rather than coveting the bird in the hand, Neuren's soggy share price suggests investors are peering in the bushes for the next company-transforming drug to take flight.

Neuren has embraced this metaphoric ornithological quest, last month unveiling a new development program for the childbirth disorder hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy (HIE).

This hitherto undisclosed indication compliments Neuren's other known programs for extension neurological disorders, three of which are in phase II stage.

A drug development 'unicorn'

Neuren is an ultra-rare story of an Australian developed drug winning FDA approval, albeit in cahoots with the Nasdaq-listed Acadia.

Strictly speaking, this one's a Kiwi success tale, in that Daybue (trofinetide) was invented 20 years ago by eminent Auckland University chemist Prof Margaret Brimble.

Daybue cost about $US250 million to develop over two decades, much of which was borne in the later stages by Acadia, which acquired the North American rights in August 2018.

In March 2023, the FDA approved Daybue for Rett syndrome in adults and children aged two or more. A month later, Acadia started selling the drug. While Acadia assumed the global rights in mid-2023, Daybue is currently marketed only in the US.

Neuren's chief financial officer since 2003, Mr Pilcher succeeded Dr Richard Treagus who stepped down in 2020 after seven years in the top job.

Rett syndrome – a rare but nasty disease

Affecting only girls, Rett syndrome is caused by a genetic mutation that results in inadequate signalling between brain cells.

The disorder causes difficulties in talking, breathing, eating and sleeping. Often the girls appear to be normal until about 18 months, but then they stop meeting developmental milestones.

There are about 15,000 sufferers in Europe and 28,000 in China. In the US there are approximately 5,000 diagnosed patients, of an estimated 6,000 to 9,000 in total.

Based on naturally occurring molecules in the brain, Daybue reduces inflammation associated with excessive inflammatory cytokines and normalizes abnormally low levels of the insulin-like growth factor hormone 1 (IGF-1).

The drug is a life-long treatment.

The perils of childbirth

Hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy results from a baby's brain not getting enough oxygen or blood flow before, or shortly after, birth.

According to Neuren, HIE affects about two to three in every 1,000 births in high income countries and 10 to 30 per 1,000 births in low and middle-income geographies.

HIE's symptoms include developmental delays, cognitive impairment, cerebral palsy, and seizures.

Mr Pilcher estimates the US market at about 6,000 surviving new patients each year, about the same as for Rett syndrome.

Given the US threshold for a rare disease is fewer than 200,000 patients, Neuren expects the FDA to bestow orphan drug and rare paediatric disease designations. Neuren plans to consult with the agency in the December 2025 quarter to devise a clinical trial path.

Currently, temporary hypothermia - cooling the baby's head - is the only approved treatment.

There's a link between the company and this technique, in that it was developed by the University of Auckland's Prof Peter Gluckman (the company's first chief scientific officer and formerly New Zealand's chief scientific advisor).

"It was a clever innovation, but it does have its limitations," Mr Pilcher says. "We think we can provide a better long-term solution rather than a temporary aid".

He says HIE results from "bad luck", rather than lifestyle factors.

Phelan good about the pipeline

Despite management's enthusiasm about HIE, the condition joins the queue behind its advanced programs for four other severe genetic disorders like Rett syndrome.

They are Phelan-McDermid, Angelman, Pitt Hopkins and Prader-Willi syndromes.

As with HIE, these trials road test a less toxic Daybue variant, NNZ-2591.

The company hopes to start a phase III study for the most advanced program, Phelin McDermid.

This is subject to a chat with the FDA to determine the structure of the trial.

Mr Pilcher says that unlike with the Rett syndrome application, the company is helped by established endpoints and the diminished need for a proof-of-concept study.

While the reported results from the Phelin McDermid, Angelman and Pitt Hopkins trials were consistent, the Phelin McDermid results were the best.

In any event, the company considers Phelin McDermid to be the most attractive market, with a potential patients base twice that of the Rett syndrome population.

He notes the potential expansion of the patient base by re-classifying mis-diagnosed autism cases as Phelin McDermid patients.

The common element is a mutation of the shank3 gene.

"Autism has always been an umbrella term when people don't know what it is," says Mr Pilcher, who notes Rett syndrome patients used to be classed as autistic as well.

Acadia is not involved in these follow-on trials, as they only have the rights for Rett syndrome and Fragile X (another disorder on Neuren's to-do list, but further down).

"That means we pay for it 100 percent, but we also get 100 percent of the benefit."

Finances and performance

Neuren reported a net profit of $142 million for 2024, down 9.6 percent, with revenue down 5.1 percent to $227.8 million. (The numbers are lower because in 2023 Neuren pocketed a $US100 million upfront payment when Acadia acquired the global rights).

The total income consisted of mainly quarterly royalties of $56.2 million (up 109 percent), sales milestone payments of $80.5 million (up 35 percent) and $76.5 million of proceedings from Acadia's sale of a Rare Paediatric Disease Priority Review Voucher (PRV, see below). The company also banked interest of $11 million.

The profit derives from milestone and royalty payments from Acadia, which is selling the drug in North America and has the rights to distribute elsewhere. Acadia bears the cost of selling Daybue.

Acadia reported 2024 Daybue net sales of $US348.4 million, up 97 percent and has guided to current year sales of $US380 million to $US405 million.

Given that, Neuren expects current-year royalties of $US62 million to $US67 million. In the first two years of Daybue sales - 2023 and 2024 - Neuren chalked up cumulative income of $445 million.

Over the last 12 months Neuren shares have danced between $24 (May 27 last year) and their April 9, 2025 nadir of $8.73. The stock has not escaped the harsh biotech sell-down, having tumbled 28 percent over the last month.

Neuren peaked at $25 in late December 2023. Twelve years ago, the shares were worth just a few pennies – or 3.0 cents to be exact (before a 20-to-one consolidation).

Cashed up and buying back shares

In January, Neuren banked a handy $US50 million - its share of Acadia's Priority Review Voucher (PRV) which sold for a bonanza $US150 million. And Neuren launched a share buyback of up to $50 million, which is about half completed.

The FDA awarded the PRV to Acadia on approval of Daybue, the idea being that any second drug gets valuable fast-track review status. But the PRVs more commonly are sold to another pharma company - which is what Acadia did.

Mr Pilcher says the voucher expected to sell for only $US100 million, so the company in effect received a bonus $US17 million on its one-third share.

Mr Pilcher says with $359 million in the bank, Neuren is in a "privileged position".

"More milestone payments are expected from Acadia, once Daybue rolls out in Europe and Japan."

He (roughly) estimates the cost of the trials at $US50 million to $US100 million each, bearing in mind these costs would be spread over some years.

Monitoring the Daybue drop-outs

Investors have focused on the discontinuance rate of Daybue, owing to known side effects such as diarrhoea.

In early 2023, a report from short-selling activist New York short-seller Culper Research alleged Daybue had been a “complete flop” for these reasons. The assertions were largely discredited, but the shares fell 13 percent.

Sentiment wasn’t helped by Acadia proffering overly frothy 2024 revenue guidance, which it had to temper in August after June quarter sales fell slightly short of expectations.

Acadia reports that 62 percent of patients have been on Daybue for 12 months or longer and Mr Pilcher says such rates are typical of those for other treatments of chronic, life-long conditions, with patients tending to peel off for “all sorts of reasons”.

He describes the “stable and predictable” continuation rate is improving as the company learns more about optimum dosage.

While all Daybue sales currently are derived from the US, the company expects first Canadian sales in the September 2025 quarter and European approval in the March quarter of 2026 (but Acadia will initiate some early-access programs).

The company says with 70 percent of the 5,500 to 5,800 diagnosed Rett patients yet to try Daybue, there is “substantial potential for growth” in the US. Growth measures include attracting patients beyond the Rett syndrome “centres of excellence”, while Acadia has expanded its sales force by 30 percent.

Dr Boreham’s diagnosis:

The company now has a poultice of real-world data on Daybue’s use in the US, which can support approval applications for the other indications as well as Daybue in Europe.

“Until there’s a competing product to take sales away, I don’t see how they won’t keep going,” Mr Pilcher says.

Speaking of which, two gene therapies are being developed in the US, but Mr Pilcher says “it is very unclear how good the data and safety profile is”. In any event, the treatments could be compatible with Neuren’s, rather than competing.

Unsurprising, Mr Pilcher is unhappy about the share price, attributing the malaise to institutional momentum and index trading rather than retail day traders. “The market frustratingly is driven by momentum rather than fundamentals at the moment,” he says, undeterred. “There’s a cascade of long-term growth for us,” he says.

Disclosure: Dr Boreham is not a qualified medical practitioner and does not possess a doctorate of any sort. His achievements come in trickles, rather than cascades.

ARGENICA THERAPEUTICS

Argenica says it has dosed all 92 patients in its phase II trial of ARG-007 for acute ischaemic stroke, with results expected by October 2025.

Last year, Argenica said it dosed the first cohort in the study, with no adverse events reported; and earlier this year, said it had dosed 79 of the 92 patients and that the independent data safety monitoring board had recommended the trial continue "with no modification to the study protocol" (BD: Apr 10, 2024; Jan 30, 2025).

Today, Argenica said 92 patients with confirmed large vessel occlusion strokes, who had undergone an endovascular thrombectomy procedure to remove the clot, had been dosed with either intra-venous infused ARG-007, or placebo, in the trial.

The company said the trial would remain blinded until the final patient had received follow-up functional assessment performed 90-days post-stroke.

Argenica said that, following the assessment, the data would be locked and un-blinded, and it expected topline data on the primary endpoint of safety and secondary endpoint of a reduction in infarct, or tissue death, volume by October 2025.

Argenica managing-director Dr Liz Dallimore said the company was "delighted to achieve such a significant milestone in the company's clinical development of ARG-007 in ischaemic stroke, and so quickly".

"The pace of dosing in this trial is a testament to the incredible stroke clinical research capabilities we have in Australia, our trial has outperformed similar trials conducted globally," Dr Dallimore said.

Argenica was up 5.5 cents or 8.2 percent to 72.5 cents.

IMRICOR MEDICAL SYSTEMS

Imricor says it has begun its Vision-magnetic resonance imaging ablation catheter for ventricular tachycardia (VT) trial, with the first procedure performed successfully.

In 2023, Imricor said it had Netherlands approval for a 64-patient, safety and efficacy trial of its Vision-magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) ablation catheter for ventricular tachycardia to support a Conformité Européenne (CE) submission (BD: Aug 1, 2023).

Later that year, the company said the trial had been delayed due to its first Netherlands' patient developing an infection prior to the procedure; and soon after, said it had approval to begin the trial in Germany (BD: Sep 20, 26, 2023).

Today, Imricor said the procedure at the Amsterdam University Medical Centre was "the first-in-human ventricular ablation guided by real-time interventional cardiac magnetic resonance (ICMR) with the company's Northstar mapping system".

Imricor said the procedure was "several world firsts" including the first ventricular ablation to be guided real-time by magnetic resonance imaging.

The company said the patient was treated for right-sided and left-sided premature ventricular complexes.

Imricor managing-director Steve Wedan said he "formed Imricor in 2006 with the goal of delivering MRI-compatible catheters and systems that would enable real-time ICMR guidance of complex ventricular and atrial ablation procedures, where the power of MRI has the potential to deliver better, faster, safer, and less expensive treatment for patients suffering from irregular heartbeats".

"Today was a huge milestone for me and for all of us at Imricor, but we couldn't have done it without the talented and dedicated team of medical professionals at Amsterdam [University Medical Centre]," Mr Wedan said. "This is a start of a new era for Imricor and, I believe, a new era for electrophysiology."

Imricor was up 11.5 cents or 8.5 percent to $1.47 with 1.3 million shares traded.

MAYNE PHARMA

Mayne Pharma says Therapeutics MD Inc (TXMD) has filed legal proceedings against one of its US subsidiaries in the US District Court for the District of Delaware.

Mayne said the proceedings alleged “breach of contract, breach of implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing, fraudulent inducement to settle a prior portion of the net working capital adjustment and unjust enrichment”.

The company said the breach “related to its calculation of amounts owed by TXMD for various net working capital adjustments under the transaction agreement” entered into between the two companies on December 4, 2022.

In 2022, Mayne said it would pay Therapeutics MD $US140 million ($A225 million) for three women’s health products and a portfolio of pre-natal vitamins, (BD: Dec 5, 2022).

At that time, the company said the products were Annovera for contraception, Imvexxy for painful intercourse and Bijuva for hot flushes, with the transaction to include “inventory and regulatory filings to support the operation and commercialization of the portfolio”.

Today, Mayne said the claims “related to one of a series of disputes that have been in discussion between Mayne Pharma and TXMD for some time”.

The company said it had a “number of separate claims against TXMD that allege damages which Mayne Pharma believes are in excess of the value of the claims made by TXMD in this proceeding, and will address those in due course”.

The company said the proceedings were “not an attempt to terminate the transaction agreement … or Mayne Pharma’s rights with respect to the [TXMD] products”.

Mayne said it intended to “vigorously defend the proceeding” and “emphatically denies any and all allegations of wrongdoing and believes the proceeding to be without merit, but there is no assurance that Mayne Pharma would be successful in any defence thereof”.

Mayne Pharma fell two cents or 0.3 percent to $6.98 with 1.3 million shares traded.

COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC INDUSTRIAL AND RESEARCH ORGANISATION

The CSIRO says it has selected 11 research projects for its three-month On Accelerate program for entrepreneurial researchers.

The CSIRO said the program provided researchers with “the tools and resources needed to translate their … ideas into real-world impact [and connected] researchers with industry experts and investors, enabling them to refine and validate their ideas for commercial success, ultimately helping them secure funding and build successful companies”.

The CSIRO said its On Accelerate program had developed 83 companies and secured more than $336 million in commercialization grants.

The Organisation said “biotechnology and healthcare … dominate” the ninth cohort of On Accelerate and the selected projects included the Australian National University spin-out Ability Optics for imaging hardware that led to “faster, more cost-effective cell and tissue microscopy techniques”, the University of Melbourne’s Elemental Therapeutics for its research on antibiotics against drug-resistant infections, the University of Sydney’s Enhanced Analgesics for non-opioid chronic pain drugs and the University of South Australia’s Epiblox for its childhood epilepsy therapy.

The CSIRO said other projects were Proseek Bio for its ovarian cancer blood test, Topicure for its gel-based formulations for drug delivery through the skin and Viortec for its surgical devices hip and knee replacement.

The Organisation said the teams had undergone an immersion period, to be followed by the three-month program that would end in an event in Melbourne on June 5, 2025.

The CSIRO said graduating teams would “emerge with a robust business model, a clear route to market, and the foundations to build a viable start-up”.

AUSBIOTECH

Ausbiotech says session proposal submissions and nominations of industry leaders for its 2025 Conference will close on April 24, 2025.

Ausbiotech said members of the life science industry could “help shape the conversation at Ausbiotech 2025 by submitting a session proposal that showcases groundbreaking research, innovation and sector leadership”.

The industry organization said topics could include digital health, medical technology, bio-pharmaceuticals and agricultural biotechnology.

Ausbiotech said its members could “recognize outstanding contributions to the life sciences sector by nominating a distinguished peer for one of our prestigious orations”.

The organization said the orations were the Prof Nancy Millis oration, sponsored by CSL, as well as the Dr Iris Depaz oration, sponsored by Sanofi.

Ausbiotech said the event would be held from October 21 to 24, 2025 in Melbourne.

To submit a session proposal, go to: https://bit.ly/42A14Aa.

To nominate an industry leader, go to: https://bit.ly/42sLl5S.