

Life sciences

GliaPharm, a Geneva-based biotech company, completes a CHF 2 million financing to advance its drug development program for an orphan neurological disease.

This also opens the door to the development of novel therapeutic approaches for key pathological conditions linked with brain metabolism deficiencies.

Geneva (Switzerland), Campus Biotech, May 25th, 2020. **GliaPharm SA specialises in the research and development of novel therapies to treat and prevent neurological diseases by targeting glial cells, has completed a CHF 2 million financing. The company is initially focusing on an orphan neurological disease caused by a deficiency in brain metabolism that affects more than 100'000 children around the world from an early age through to adulthood. GliaPharm's therapeutic approach aims to restore brain energy metabolism in these patients through novel drugs generated with its drug discovery platform GliaX™. This new approach is promising in offering a treatment to these patients as well as opens the door to broader indications linked to brain metabolism deficiencies, such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease. This spinoff from EPFL announces the successful completion of a CHF 1,5 million financing supported by Gliaven LLC, a US-based investor. This comes in addition to a CHF 500'000 financing by private angel investors, bringing the total amount raised to date to CHF 2 million.**

“This financing will also provide the necessary resources to develop our brain metabolism drug discovery platform and prepare for an equity financing”, says Ambroise Magistretti, Co-CEO and co-founder. Thanks to the support of Gliaven LLC and private angel investors, GliaPharm will be able to advance its drug development program and generate key preclinical data for the next anticipated round of financing. GliaPharm is grounded on strong academic leadership in the field of brain metabolism and glial cells biology and aims at clinically applying fundamental discoveries from three decades of academic research. “Thanks to the fact that the Campus Biotech and its high-tech facilities remained open during the COVID-19 crisis, we were able to keep our research on track, onboard an investor and hire two additional collaborators”, adds Ambroise Magistretti.

An orphan neurological disease as a proof of concept

The rare genetic metabolic disorder targeted is intricately linked to brain metabolism deficiency and children develop symptoms as early as the age of one month. A genetic and metabolic diagnosis exists.

“The targeted disease is characterised by frequent epileptic seizures, neuromuscular and cognitive deficiencies, currently lacking efficient treatment”, indicates Dr. Sylvain Lengacher, co-CEO and co-founder. This indication is the principal target in this first step, as a proof of concept in neurological diseases linked to hypometabolism and a model for biomarker analyses. GliaPharm has developed a proprietary screening platform to identify drugs that target glial cells' activity and brain energy metabolism. “GliaX™, our glia-centric platform is a key asset to explore cerebral hypometabolism involved in other neurological diseases such as dementia, Alzheimer's disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and depression. It could also provide insights into normal ageing processes”, adds Dr. Charles Finsterwald, CSO and co-founder. The company is

developing its pipeline program to establish a new class of molecules for neuroprotection and maintenance of cognitive functions.

GliaPharm's pipeline of patented molecules target glial cells and brain hypometabolism. The team's research has shown neuroprotective mechanisms that target glia, and behavioural improvements in pre-clinical models, including memory models. GliaPharm wants to demonstrate that - by restoring metabolism - its molecules are able to treat symptoms such as epilepsy, motor disorders or cognitive deficits. The Geneva team collaborates with a leading academic and clinical team in the USA to validate this approach in the orphan disease model. "In brief, we want to bring more energy to the brain", says Dr. Lengacher. "This validation will be accompanied by an analysis of brain imaging biomarkers to demonstrate efficiency in pre-clinical models as well as in humans in a non-invasive manner", concludes Dr. Finsterwald. This first financing will allow GliaPharm to carry out these important pre-clinical trials and advance the development towards patients.

On the importance of glial cells – the other half of the brain

Until today, neuroscience has mainly focused on neurons. Yet, the nervous system is made up of equal amounts – 100 billion each - of neurons and glial cells: astrocytes, oligodendrocytes, and microglia. GliaPharm clinically applies over three decades of fundamental discoveries demonstrating that glial cells are key elements of brain function.

Company History

GliaPharm is a Swiss biotechnology company that develops innovative approaches to treat neurological and psychiatric disorders. GliaPharm was created in 2016 as a spinoff company of the laboratory of Prof. Pierre Magistretti, one of GliaPharm's co-founders, at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL, Switzerland), a leading research laboratory in the field of brain metabolism and glial cell biology. In 2017, GliaPharm has established its laboratory at the Campus Biotech in Geneva, Switzerland. Through its in-house R&D laboratory and network with selected partners, GliaPharm provides the necessary platform to develop clinical applications arising from the know-how and fundamental discoveries accumulated throughout three decades of research in the academic setting. GliaPharm also succeeded in bringing together international experts in the field of glial cells. Prof. Andrea Volterra, thought leader in glial biology and Prof. Yves Agid, specialist in neurodegenerative diseases, are members of the company's scientific advisory board.

GliaPharm was advised by sigma legal on the Gliaven LLC transaction.

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