

DRUG COMPANY DEVELOPS NEW TREATMENT THAT COULD PROTECT MILLIONS FROM KILLER DISEASE

Morvus Technology, the fast-growing drug discovery company in Wiltshire has discovered and patented a new treatment for a potentially fatal tropical disease that affects millions of people worldwide.

Morvus Technology, which is based at the Tetricus bio-incubation unit at Porton Down, specialises in developing commercially attractive drug therapies and finding new applications for existing treatments.

Company researchers have discovered that the anti-cancer drug Tretazicar can kill dangerous micro-organisms including Leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease spread through bites from sandflies.

The disease affects about 12 million people globally, most of them in the developing world, and has become a growing problem for British and other troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The most dangerous form of the disease is visceral leishmaniasis - also known as black fever - which attacks the body's immune system and is nearly always fatal if left untreated.

"The drugs currently available to treat the disease are quite toxic and have unpleasant side effects," said Dr Roger Melton, development director at Morvus Technology. "The organism can also develop resistance to them quite quickly.

“But we have discovered that the Tretazicar anti-cancer drug can be very effective in treating the disease. It is expected that only small doses will be needed and there should be no adverse side effects.”

It is expected that clinical trials of the drug will begin next year and Morvus, which is opening additional premises in South West Wales, is looking for a commercial partner to market the drug in the developing world and is also in talks with an international charity which wants to license the drug in the Third World.

Dr Melton added that being based at Tetricus – which provides fledgling biotechnology firms with a mixture of serviced office and laboratory accommodation and access to an unrivalled knowledge network – offered a number of important benefits.

“We have been able to use the facilities and expertise of the Health Protection Agency and Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), which are also based at Porton Down,” said Dr Melton. “Having all this expertise on one site has been very helpful to us.”

Dr Clive Duggleby, General Manager of Tetricus, said: “Tetricus is much more than just a landlord. As well as providing tenant companies with the professional support and infrastructure they need to realise their commercial ambitions, we can also offer companies like Morvus access to a world-class knowledge network that includes some of the nation’s most talented scientists and provides a real catalyst for growth.

“Our partnership with the Dstl – which is the centre of scientific excellence for the Ministry of Defence - and our close links with the Health Protection Agency (HPA) provides fledgling biotech companies with a scientific support structure that is second to none.”

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Tetricus

Tetricus is based at Porton Down near Salisbury and provides specialist premises and business support for biotechnology companies. It offers 25,000 Sq ft. of laboratory and office space to SME biotechnology and bioscience companies.

It is a joint venture between three organisations, each bringing complementary capabilities and expectations to the incubator unit:

- Dstl is a department of the MOD which was set up by the government to transfer technological expertise and research to the commercial UK market
- New Sarum Enterprises is a partnership of professionals whose aim is to provide assistance for the development of new companies by assistance with business development including scientific strategy and financing requirements
- Great Western Enterprise provides expertise to Tetricus in three key areas of business activity: property management, economic development and professional consultancy services

For further information please log on to www.tetricus.co.uk or call Clive Duggleby on 01980 556514.

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