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Skuldtech secures €1m to develop blood biomarker test for Alzheimer's disease

11 September 2013

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French biotechnology company Skuldtech has secured €1m in funding from Bpifrance (French public financing structure) to develop a blood biomarker test for Alzheimer's disease.

It is part of a four-year project that has received funding of €8.6 million in total, with the first results expected in 2018.

Skuldtech has joined forces with AB Science for this program, with the aim of developing a new therapy for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. As part of the program, Skuldtech will develop a companion diagnostic for AB Science's masitinib molecule and a diagnostic for the validity of cognitive tests and tests to predict the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

Using blood samples taken as part of the Phase III trial of masitinib in Alzheimer's disease, Skuldtech will identify the blood biomarkers that will help make simple, reliable diagnostic tests available as a matter of routine. This will result in treatments that can be tailored to the patient and the ability to monitor sufferers as their disease progresses.

The clinical trial of masitinib was launched in Europe and other countries in May 2013. It expects to recruit a total of 400 patients. Blood samples from these patients will contribute to the development of a companion diagnostic by making it possible to identify those individuals most likely to benefit from the treatment.

This approach has already proven successful in the development of a new treatment for pancreatic cancer that combines gemcitabine and masitinib, where Skuldtech identified new biomarkers predicting a favorable response to treatment. The results of this clinical study led to an application to the European Medicines Agency for Marketing Authorization for masitinib in combination with companion biomarkers.

Using further blood samples, Skuldtech will also develop a diagnostic for the validity of cognitive tests and tests predicting the progression (slow or rapid) of Alzheimer's disease.

This project builds on Skuldtech's recent success in identifying blood

biomarkers associated with a cognitive score. The company identified two sets of new blood markers, each associated with two trisomy 21 patient populations with low and high IQs respectively. The results of this study were published in the European Journal of Human Genetics in February 2013 (Megarbane et al). By describing the blood transcriptional profile of each group, Skuldtech identified specific biomarkers corresponding to a level of response in cognitive tests. The company hopes to emulate this result in the Alzheimer's disease program.

Skuldtech is keen to use the funding to capitalize on its broadband sequencing-based technological platform, pairing it with proprietary bioinformatics and biostatistics programs to measure and confirm the stage of progression of Alzheimer's disease.

"This new partnership to work on Alzheimer's disease will strengthen Skuldtech's position in the field of personalized medicine and in the development of companion diagnostics associated with new treatments in phases of clinical trials," said Didier Ritter, CEO, Skuldtech. "As well as bringing new diagnostics to market, we are also open to similar partnerships with other biotech companies or with pharmaceutical laboratories."



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