

Presse Release
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Cancer research technology and kurma biofund to develop new antibody platform for translational research

CANCER RESEARCH TECHNOLOGY, the commercial arm of Cancer Research UK, and Paris-based venture capital firm, Kurma Life Sciences Partners (Kurma), have launched a spin-out company, BliNK Therapeutics Ltd, to generate monoclonal antibodies* using a novel platform**.

BliNK Therapeutics will develop the novel platform to generate therapeutic and diagnostic monoclonal antibodies towards clinically relevant targets. The technology is based on research carried out by the founding scientists Dr Facundo Batista, at Cancer Research UK's London Research Institute in collaboration with Professor Vincenzo Cerundolo at the University of Oxford.

The platform technology provides a new way of activating the immune system's B cells to produce antibodies in response to a specific antigen. Antigens are molecules that cause an immune response and can come from parasites, viruses, bacteria or even cancerous tumours' cells, while B cells are the antibody-making factories in the immune system.

Kurma has committed up to £1.1m as seed financing, the investment to start-up the company, and up to £6.6m in further financing for BliNK Therapeutics.

Richard Treisman, director of Cancer Research UK's London Research Institute, said: "We host 46 research groups carrying out life-saving research to understand the fundamental biology of cancer – an essential step in the development of new approaches to diagnose and treat the disease.

"This technology, developed by our scientists, will be vitally important in supporting our translational studies. Our scientists have played a critical role in contributing to the knowledge that has enabled cancer survival rates to double in the last 40 years and we hope that this important investment will quicken the pace of research to continue to save more lives from cancer."

Keith Blundy, CEO of Cancer Research Technology, said: "This investment is great news. It's immensely exciting that this venture with Kurma will enable us to translate fundamental research of B cell biology into a powerful platform for the generation of monoclonal antibodies."

Alain Maiore, managing partner, Kurma, said: "We're delighted to have completed our first investment with CRT and Cancer Research UK – and excited by the enormous potential of this antibody platform which has been developed and will be implemented by an expert team of scientists."

Dr Facundo Batista, BLINK's founding scientist at Cancer Research UK's London Research Institute, said: "My group carries out research to better understand how our immune system responds to infections and cancer and I am delighted our discoveries have attracted investment of fresh resources that will allow us to continue to expand and apply our knowledge in this incredibly important field of research."

Parent B cells carry receptors; each receptor detects a single different antigen. Once a B cell receptor recognises its 'partner' antigen, the parent B cell 'matures' to produce specific antibodies in response –generating millions of 'daughter' B cells capable of producing large quantities of the same antibody.

The new platform technology allows generation of monoclonal antibodies directly from human B cells and towards specific antigens, even when the 'parent' B cells are rare or when the antigens are hard for B cells to detect.

For media enquiries please contact Emma Rigby on 020 3469 8300 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

*Monoclonal antibodies are specific to one antigen – or foreign molecule. They are all identical because they are made by identical immune cells derived from one original parent cell.

**Platform technology is a phrase to describe the technology which allows products to be developed.

About Kurma Life Sciences Partners

Kurma Biofund is a venture capital fund managed by Paris based Kurma Life Sciences Partners (KLS Partners). Founded in July 2009, Kurma manages in excess of 135M€. KLS Partners is supported by two long-term investors (Natixis, part of Group BPCE the second largest French bank, and state-owned Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations – CDC). Kurma actively invests in all stages of the biotech value chain, from technology transfer through to more established companies. www.kls-partners.com

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About the London Research Institute

The Cancer Research UK London Research Institute (LRI) conducts innovative basic biological research to improve our understanding of cancer. The LRI has 550 staff and students and houses 46 research groups based at two locations: Lincoln's Inn Fields laboratories in central London, and Clare Hall laboratories on London's outskirts at South Mimms, Hertfordshire. For more information visit www.london-research-institute.co.uk

About Cancer Research Technology (CRT)

Cancer Research Technology (CRT) is a specialist commercialisation and development company, which aims to develop new discoveries in cancer research for the benefit of cancer patients. CRT works closely with leading international cancer scientists and their institutes to protect intellectual property arising from their research and to establish links with commercial partners. CRT facilitates the discovery, development and marketing of new cancer therapeutics, vaccines, diagnostics and enabling technologies. CRT is a wholly owned subsidiary of Cancer Research UK, the largest independent funder of cancer research in the world. Further information about CRT can be found at www.cancertechnology.com

About Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. The charity's groundbreaking work into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer has helped save millions of lives. This work is funded entirely by the public.

Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates double in the last forty years.

Cancer Research UK supports research into all aspects of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses.

Together with its partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK's vision is to beat cancer.

For further information about Cancer Research UK's work or to find out how to support the charity, please call 020 7121 6699 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org