

Drug Response Dx Concludes First Round of Financing with Support from QIAGEN and High-Tech Gründerfonds

The Hennigsdorf firm Drug Response Dx GmbH (DRDx GmbH) successfully concluded its first round of financing with High-Tech Gründerfonds and QIAGEN. The investment will serve to develop a biomarker test kit for rheumatoid arthritis treatment guidance with so-called TNF-alpha inhibitors. The test is secured by a unique patent platform exclusively in-licensed by the Max Planck Society.

Hennigsdorf / Bonn / Hilden, January 7, 2013

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is the most widespread autoimmune illness in the world, affecting around 70 million people. Only an effective therapy introduced early on can lessen the serious consequences of this illness and improve the quality of life of patients.

One of the most important therapeutic options for RA involves inhibitors of the tumor necrosis factor (TNF-alpha). Due to cost, TNF-alpha inhibitors (€12,000–20,000 per patient/year) are only used today when conventional medications (€100–1,000 per patient/year) have proven ineffective over the course of months.

However, TNF-alpha inhibitors also only show success after three to six months at the earliest and only for 60–70% of patients. For so-called non-responders, it may often take up to a year of valuable time until effective medication is employed. Early, directed treatment, however, can lead to a complete remission of the disease. Patients, physicians, and sponsors are thus urgently seeking ways to improve the therapeutic decision process for rheumatoid arthritis.

The solution: The DRDx test kit based on protein biomarkers. It enables one to predict the individual effectiveness of TNF-alpha inhibitors for each RA patient before medication is given.

The founders of DRDx, Dr. Zoltán Konthur and Dr. Karl Skriner, have a background in internationally renowned scientific circles (Max Planck Society and Charité). Joining them is Dr. Jörg-M. Hollidt, an entrepreneur in the area of in vitro diagnostics (IVD) and CEO of in.vent Diagnostica GmbH. After several years of collaboration, the team has developed a biomarker set and from it the functional model of a routinely applicable test kit. This enables DRDx to identify with confidence those RA patients not susceptible to therapy with TNF-alpha inhibitors.

A proof of concept is already in place for the antibody-based verification procedure in an ELISA format (Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay). The required biomarkers can also already be produced in high technical quality and fairly large quantities. "The next steps in development now concern the clinical validation of our diagnostic. In addition, we will test to what extent we can predict the effectiveness of TNF-alpha inhibitors for other indications and the effectiveness of non-TNF-alpha medications for RA," says Managing Director Dr. Konthur.

"The diagnostics industry should continue to grow in the coming year – especially thanks to its driving force, companion diagnostics (CDx)," says Dr. Hollidt. "They are going to promote not only personalized medicine, but the development of better (bio-)therapeutics as well. CDx allow us to stratify patients early on and accompany the therapy on site. They support the niche-busters of the pharmaceutical industry on one hand and the development of integrated provision plans on the other. The demand for personalized therapies will continue to increase, and with it the demand for diagnostics. So we are very happy to have QIAGEN and HTGF on board as investors," says CEO Dr. Hollidt. "This partnership will make it possible to prepare the biomarkers of DRDx for routine use as quickly as possible and let patients around the world profit from this new development."

Max Planck Innovation GmbH, as a technology transfer organization, has supported the establishment of the spin-off company from the first business concept to the conclusion of this round of financing – significantly also through providing external experts in the context of the funding initiative "Innovation Meets Management," supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). "We are glad to have found two well-known investors with the diagnostics company QIAGEN and High-Tech Gründerfonds (HTGF). Their participation confirms the high expectations that we have regarding innovative technology in the area of companion diagnostics," report Astrid Giegold, Start-up & Portfolio Manager and Dr. Dieter Link, Patent & License Manager at Max Planck Innovation.

Dr. Martin Pfister, Investment Manager at High-Tech Gründerfonds, adds: "DRDx convinced us not only through competent management – their robust companion diagnostics test provides urgently needed help for RA patients through early and reliable therapy. And not least, this addresses a multi-billion dollar pharmaceutical market. We're excited about our first joint investment with our fund investor QIAGEN."

About Drug Response Dx GmbH

The company is based in Hennigsdorf, Germany and was founded in February 2012 by Dr. Zoltán Konthur, Dr. Jörg-M. Hollidt, Dr. Karl Skriner and Dr. Joachim Rautter. The biomarker set is prevalidated; the biochemicals and test samples are present. The proof of concept in serums from RA patients is established.

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About Max Planck Innovation

As a technology transfer organization of the Max Planck Society, Max Planck Innovation is the link between industry and basic research. Our interdisciplinary team provides consulting and support for scientists in evaluating inventions, applying for patents, and founding companies. We offer industry a central point of access to the innovations of the Max Planck Institutes. We thus provide the important function of converting the results of basic research into economically and socially useful products.

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About High-Tech Gründerfonds

High-Tech Gruenderfonds invests in young high-tech start-ups. The seed financing provided is designed to enable start-ups to take an idea through prototyping and to market launch. Typically, High-Tech Gruenderfonds invests EUR 500,000 in the seed stage, with the potential for up to a total of EUR 2 million per portfolio company in follow-on financing. Investors in this public/private partnership include the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, the KfW Banking Group, as well as fourteen industrial groups of ALTANA, BASF, B. Braun, Robert Bosch, CEWE Color, Daimler, Deutsche Post DHL, Deutsche Telekom, Evonik, Qiagen, RWE Innogy, SAP, Tengelmann and Carl Zeiss. High-Tech Gruenderfonds has about EUR 565,5 million under management in two funds (EUR 272 million HTGF I, EUR 293,5 million HTGF II).

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