



PRESS RELEASE

Augustine Therapeutics awarded EUR 1.2 million VLAIO research grant to develop new medicines for neuromuscular diseases

Leuven, Belgium, 23rd March 2021 - Augustine Therapeutics, a biotech spin-out company from VIB that focuses on the development of novel innovative therapies for rare peripheral neuropathies and neurogenerative disorders, has received EUR 1.2 million in funding from the Flanders Agency for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO). The grant will be used to support the development of new medicines for peripheral neuropathies through innovative research by elucidating the mode of action of second-generation selective HDAC6 inhibitors developed by Augustine Therapeutics

The project awarded by this grant will be further characterizing the biology of Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (CMT), a severe debilitating disease affecting nearly 2.6 million people worldwide (Source: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, NIH). Moreover, Augustine Therapeutics aims at identifying the potential neuroprotective actions of an innovative therapeutic strategy: HDAC6 inhibitors. Gaining knowledge on the mode of action of these compounds will be the foundation for the development of new cures for peripheral neuropathies disorders including CMT.

Sylvain Celanire, CEO, comments: "This funding is not only an excellent boost for our innovative research towards first-in-class medicines for CMT-patients; it is also an external validation of the quality and importance of our pioneering work. We are grateful for the financial support from VLAIO and pleased to support its mission of advancing world-class innovation in the Flanders region."

Charcot-Marie-Tooth Disease, a severe debilitating neurodegenerative disease

CMT is the most common form of inherited peripheral neuropathy that affects 1 in 2500 people (Source: European Charcot-Marie-Tooth Federation (ECMTF)) and is one of the most prevalent of the so-called rare diseases (defined by the EC Regulation 141/2000). CMT and all its variants represent an important unmet medical need as there are no approved therapies available for these patients. CMT is clinically characterized by the progressive loss of force and sensation due to gradual denervation. Patients with CMT experience difficulty walking and frequently fall because of weakness of the lower legs and feet.

As the disease progresses, patients show hand and foot deformities. CMT disease presents differently in each person, even between affected members of the same family. In several cases, middle-aged patients require the use of a wheelchair and need assistance in everyday life. As such, CMT imposes a devastating impact on the patients' quality of life.

A program holding great promise for potential breakthrough in the treatment of CMT and other neuropathies

The HDAC6 protein plays a central role in various processes that are key for neuronal survival. HDAC6 was identified by Prof. Ludo Van Den Bosch and his research group one decade ago as a relevant therapeutic target for the development of new drugs for the treatment of CMT (Source: Nature Medicine, 2011).

Ludo Van Den Bosch, founding scientist and member of the Scientific Advisory Board, explains: “Inhibitors of HDAC6 hold great promise for the treatment of CMT and other neuropathies. We already made great progress in understanding its mode of action. The new ambitions described in the project funded by VLAIO are the next steps for us to ultimately provide safe and effective solutions for patients.”

This two-and-a-half-year R&D project will enable further understanding how to use HDAC6 inhibitors in various disease model systems. This information is needed for the development of novel and safer drugs to treat CMT. It is a collaboration between Augustine Therapeutics, VIB Discovery Sciences and the team of Ludo Van Den Bosch at the VIB/KU Leuven Center for Brain & Disease Research, aiming to gain in-depth knowledge about the biology of CMT and characterizing the potential protective action of HDAC6 inhibitors at the neuronal and axonal level.

Jérôme Van Biervliet, Managing Director of VIB, comments: “We are very happy with the financial support and recognition from VLAIO for the ongoing strategic collaboration between VIB and our spin-off Augustine Therapeutics. The VIB Discovery Sciences team and the VIB lab of Ludo Van Den Bosch have been continuously supporting Augustine in advancing this innovative project. We look forward to the new treatment options our spin-off will develop to benefit patients suffering from neuromuscular diseases.”

About Augustine Therapeutics

Augustine Therapeutics focuses on the development of new medicines to treat severe debilitating diseases with high unmet need, in particular Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (CMT) as well as other peripheral neuropathies. Augustine Therapeutics completed a seed financing round of EUR 4.2 million in December 2019 with the support of VIB, V-Bio Ventures and PMV joined by Advent France Biotechnology and the Gemma Frisius Fund. Augustine Therapeutics is a drug discovery company building a portfolio of first-in-class drugs rooted in the ground-breaking research on neurodegenerative disorders of Prof. Ludo Van Den Bosch, Prof. Joris De Wit and Prof. Bart De Strooper at VIB. www.augustinetx.com

About VLAIO

The Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) is an organization of the Flemish government for all entrepreneurs in Flanders. The mission of VLAIO is to stimulate and support innovation and entrepreneurship and to contribute to a favorable business-climate in Flanders. The activities of VLAIO comprise stimulating growth and innovation by financially supporting businesses through subsidies; inspiring entrepreneurship by collaborating with different parties that can guide SMEs with the (pre)start from growth until maturity or take-over; supporting clusters and enhancing environmental factors such as facilitating the development of business areas. www.vlaio.be

About VIB

VIB is an excellence-based entrepreneurial research institute in life sciences located in Flanders, Belgium. VIB's basic research leads to new and innovative insights into normal and pathological life processes. It unites the expertise of all its collaborators and research groups in a single institute, firmly based on its close partnership with 5 Flemish universities (Ghent University, KU Leuven, University of Antwerp, Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Hasselt University). VIB is supported by a solid funding program from the Flemish government. VIB has an excellent track record on translating basic scientific results into pharmaceutical, agricultural and industrial applications. Since its foundation in 1996, VIB has created 27 start-up companies, now employing over 900 people. www.vib.be.

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL the 23/03/2021 at 8:00 am

About KU Leuven

KU Leuven is Europe's most innovative university (Reuters) and ranks 48th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. As Belgium's largest university, KU Leuven welcomes nearly 60,000 students from over 140 countries. Its 7,000 researchers are active in a comprehensive range of disciplines. KU Leuven is a founding member of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) and has a strong European and international orientation. University Hospitals Leuven, its network of research hospitals, provides high-quality healthcare and develops new therapeutic and diagnostic insights with an emphasis on translational research.www.kuleuven.be