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Astellas and Yaskawa to establish joint venture in Japan focused on cell therapy manufacturing

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Joint venture will aim to develop a cell therapy manufacturing platform through robotics



Japan-headquartered Astellas Pharma Inc. and Yaskawa Electric Corporation have signed a definitive agreement to establish a joint venture for the development of a cell therapy product manufacturing platform utilising the dual-arm robot 'Maholo'. In addition, the joint venture will offer platform access to startups and academic institutions, fostering collaboration and innovation in the field of cell therapy.

In the pharmaceutical industry, the commercialisation of cell therapy faces many challenges stemming from the complex nature of the manufacturing process, in particular, related to the accuracy and reproducibility of cell manufacturing. Furthermore, the need for a skilled workforce, coupled with the time and cost investments required for technology transfer to manufacturing facilities, presents additional hurdles. Based on the Memorandum of Agreement signed in May, 2024, Astellas and Yaskawa have been advancing discussions toward establishing a joint venture to leverage their mutual strengths and accelerate efforts to address these challenges.

The planned joint venture will leverage Astellas' expertise in R&D and manufacturing for cell therapy and the dual arm robot Maholo, developed by Yaskawa's subsidiary, Robotic Biology Institute. The closing and establishment of the joint venture company are subject to certain closing conditions, including receipt of required regulatory approvals.