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AstraZeneca buys EsoBiotec for $1 B to advance cell therapy ambition

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Acquisition includes world-leading in vivo delivery platform with potential to transform cell therapy



British pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire Belgium-based biotech startup EsoBiotec.

The EsoBiotec Engineered NanoBody Lentiviral (ENaBL) platform empowers the immune system to attack cancers and could offer many more patients access to transformative cell therapy treatments delivered in just minutes rather than the current process which takes weeks.

ENaBL uses highly targeted lentiviruses to deliver genetic instructions to specific immune cells, such as T cells, which programme them to recognise and destroy tumour cells for cancer treatment or autoreactive cells for potential use in immune-mediated diseases. This approach enables cell therapies to be administered through a simple IV injection and without the need for immune cell depletion.

Traditional cell therapies require cells to be removed from a patient, genetically modified outside the body, and then readministered to the patient as a medicine after immune cell depletion, typically taking weeks. By engineering immune cells directly within the patient's body, the EsoBiotec in vivo approach has the potential to address many of the barriers associated with traditional cell therapies, reducing complexities and manufacturing timelines, thereby increasing access for patients.

AstraZeneca will acquire all outstanding equity of EsoBiotec for a total consideration of up to $1billion, on a cash and debt free basis. This will include an initial payment of $425 million on deal closing, and up to $575 million in contingent consideration based on development and regulatory milestones.

The transaction is expected to close in the second quarter of 2025, subject to customary closing conditions and regulatory clearances. The transaction does not impact AstraZeneca's financial guidance for 2025.