

Merck Serono starts Phase III non-small cell lung cancer drug trial

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Singapore: Global biopharmaceutical firm Merck Serono has initiated international Phase III trial of its investigational MUC1 antigen-specific cancer immunotherapy tecemotide (also known as L-BLP25) in patients with unresectable, locally advanced Stage III non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC).

Tecemotide is an investigational MUC1 antigen-specific cancer immunotherapy that is designed to stimulate the body's immune system to identify and target cells expressing the cell-surface glycoprotein MUC1. MUC1 is expressed in many cancers, including non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), and has multiple roles in tumor growth and survival.

Tecemotide is an investigational MUC1 antigen-specific cancer immunotherapy designed to stimulate the body's immune system to identify and target cancer cells expressing the cell-surface glycoprotein MUC1.

The START study is a Phase III, multicenter, 1:1 randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial designed to assess the efficacy, safety and tolerability of tecemotide in patients suffering from unresectable, locally advanced (Stage IIIA or IIIB) NSCLC who have had a response or stable disease after at least two cycles of platinum-based concurrent chemoradiotherapy (CRT).

"Sadly, the cure rate for stage III NSCLC has not improved in recent years; novel treatment strategies are urgently needed," said Professor Suresh Ramalingam, Winship Cancer Institute, Emory University, Atlanta, coordinating clinical investigator of the START2 trial and member of the corresponding steering committee. "Modulating the immune system to treat cancer has entered an exciting new phase in the past 2 to 3 years. We hope that the START2 trial will establish tecemotide as a new

treatment option for patients with NSCLC."

Globally, lung cancer is the most common cause of cancer-related deaths in men and the third most common in women, responsible for almost twice as many deaths as both breast and prostate cancer combined. NSCLC is the most common type of lung cancer, accounting for 80-85 percent of all lung cancers, and locally advanced or Stage III disease accounts for approximately 30% of patients with NSCLC.