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12 July 2012 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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Singapore: Verastem, a biopharmaceutical company focused on discovering and developing drugs to treat breast and other cancers by targeting cancer stem cells, has signed an agreement with Pfizer for the exclusive in-license of worldwide commercial rights for VS-6063 (formerly PF-04554878), a focal adhesion kinase (FAK) inhibitor that has completed a phase I clinical study in advanced solid tumors.

FAK is a non-receptor tyrosine kinase that regulates tumor cell proliferation and invasion. The targeted disruption of this pathway in preclinical models of cancer reduces cancer stem cells, primary tumor mass and metastasis.

"Verastem has identified the FAK pathway as a critical regulator of the survival of cancer stem cells, which are an underlying cause of cancer recurrence and metastasis," said Dr Robert Weinberg, co-founder and chair of the Scientific Advisory Board at Verastem.

VS-6063 is being developed for the treatment of solid tumors. According to data presented at ASCO 2011 from a Phase 1 safety study of VS-6063 in 36 patients conducted by Pfizer, VS-6063 was well-tolerated and demonstrated signs of clinical activity to support further development. Verastem anticipates conducting clinical trials targeting solid tumor indications with VS-6063.

"Like Pfizer, Verastem is committed to bringing innovative treatments to patients with cancer," said Garry Nicholson, President and General Manager of Pfizer Oncology. "Verastem's specific focus on targeting cancer stem cells makes them the ideal company to continue the development of this compound."

Under the terms of the agreement, Verastem will assume sole responsibility for global product development of VS-6063.

Pfizer will receive an upfront payment in cash and Verastem equity, development milestones and royalties and milestones on future sales of VS-6063.

"VS-6063 accelerates Verastem's FAK inhibitor program with a clinical, Phase 2-ready product candidate targeting this key regulatory pathway for cancer stem cells," said Dr Christoph Westphal, chairman and chief executive officer of Verastem. "We believe our focus on identifying patients with a high cancer stem cell burden for treatment with our targeted therapies uniquely positions Verastem to lead the next wave of therapeutics in cancer."