BioSpectrum the business of Bio & Health Sciences ASIA EDITION

MD Anderson, Astellas collaborate to develop new drug for Acute Myeloid Leukemia

08 April 2015 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

MD Anderson, Astellas collaborate to develop new drug for Acute Myeloid Leukemia

Japanese pharma giant Astellas Pharma Inc. and The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center has signed an option agreement to research and develop a new treatment for patients with acute myeloid leukemia (AML).

The collaboration grants Astellas an option to firstly negotiate an exclusive, worldwide license at the end of Phase Ib, with both Phase Ia and Phase Ib studies to be conducted by MD Anderson. The agreement also includes up to $26 million as an option premium and research and development funding.

The collaboration will focus on h8F4 technology, a humanized monoclonal antibody invented by Jeffrey Molldrem, M.D., Professor of Stem Cell Transplantation and Cellular Therapy at MD Anderson. The antibody h8F4 targets an HLA-restricted peptide called PR1/HLA-A2, which is expressed in cancer cells and cancer stem cells. Molldrem will lead these research efforts with Carlo Toniatti, M.D., Ph.D., executive director of MD Anderson's Oncology Research for Biologics and Immunotherapy Translation (ORBIT) platform.

In the press release, Professor Molldrem expressed that the current treatments for aggressive leukemias are often toxic and hence the team desired to develop a safer, yet more potent, therapy for aggressive cancer types that currently have poor survival outcomes. Unfortunately, advancing novel discoveries from the laboratory to drug development has been historically challenging. He hopes that this important collaboration will allow them to deliver much-needed antibody-based treatment to the patient's bedside more quickly.