

Moleac takes Traditional Chinese Medicine to the world

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With an intention to address a therapeutic gap by introducing novel drug in the market, a group comprising Mr David Picard, who was then a member of the worldwide healthcare practice area at The Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Prof Marc Vasseur, Mr Bounmy Rattanavan and Prof Daniel Cohen formed Moleac in Singapore in 2003.

The group decided to focus on medical innovation to develop new therapeutics drugs within few years of its inception. In 2004, Moleac started the screening of traditional Chinese medicines in development at leading institutes in China, and evaluated about 250 promising opportunities at different stages of maturity.

The company was honored with the BioSpectrum Asia Pacific Bioscience Industry Emerging Company of the Year 2010.

The group then selected and optioned 10 drugs, including what became later Neuroaid, the first medicine that brings faster and complete recovery for stroke patients during rehabilitation. There was a clear gap in treatment whereas about 10-million stroke survivors worldwide were merely left to live with their disabilities, with no pharmacological modality to help them recover their neurological functions.

Track record

From 2004 to 2008, Moleac worked on concurrent products and devices development including a promising device for the treatment of addiction and smoking cessation. In 2009, recognizing that Neuroaid was fully-validated scientifically, commercially and clinically, Moleac decided to focus all its effort on Neuroaid and its derivatives and is now looking at candidate partners to out-license Revive, its smoking cessation device.

Neuroaid is developed from natural ingredients that are carefully selected, purified and concentrated using the latest Western medical technology and standards. Chinese clinical trials of Neuroaid, involving 800 stroke patients, demonstrated its efficacy in relieving physical and neurological disabilities caused by stroke, as well as enabling patients to ultimately achieve greater independence. These trials, performed in China from 1999 to 2001, showed that patients receiving Neuroaid are 2.4 times more likely than control patients to recover independence and achieve on an average 25 percent more recovery in their motor functions.

The approach of adopting Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) by Moleac to fill therapeutic gap in Western treatment is not only innovative but is also highly efficient in terms of product commercialization. As the efficacy of Neuroaid is proven, Moleac has been able to develop the drug with relatively low investments and commercialize it in a relatively shorter span of time. Similarly, Moleac has its base in Asia where understanding of traditional medicine was more established and is now developing towards Western Europe where its French subsidiary, Moleac Europe, is preparing the launch of Neuroaid derivatives and the implementation of clinical trials.

Neuroaid was first launched commercially in Singapore in 2006. Today, it is marketed directly to prescribers in about dozen countries through a network of distributors and made available to patients worldwide through an innovative e-commerce platform. Neuroaid is making history in being the first traditional medicine being routinely prescribed by neurologists and neurosurgeons, it is also the focus of CHIMES study, which is the largest ever clinical trial conducted on a traditional medicine in Western medicine hospital outside China. Several centers in Europe have showed interest to join CHIMES trial initiative. Six peer review articles were published over the past two-year showing an intense clinical scientific interest.

In January 2010, a team led by Prof. Lazdunski has established the novel mechanism of action of Neuroaid that shows that it increases neurogenesis, and neurites outgrowth and synaptogenesis, both of these effects can be explained by a novel mechanism to trigger the synthesis and release of the growth factor brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF). In animal models, Neuroaid provided a better post-stroke recovery of neurological functions, when given before stroke as a preventive treatment, or after stroke either immediately or in conditions mimicking delays associated with human hospitalization, Neuroaid reduced the infarct volume. This has proven to be a very convincing scientific validation of Neuroaid beneficial properties already reported for post-stroke treatment in human clinical trials. It also paves the way for a number of derivatives of Neuroaid consisting of a family of simplified formulas with enhanced patient convenient dosage, which will be released by Moleac. Neuroaid II is expected to launch in the second half of 2010.

Moleac has entered into R&D partnerships with leading research institutes in Europe, China and Singapore. This includes CNRS in France for the pharmacology research under the leadership of world-renowned pharmacologist, Prof. Michel Lazdunski, and with 16 leading hospitals in South Asia that are implementing the CHIMES clinical trial, four hospitals in the Philippines led by the University of Santo Tomas hospital and seven hospitals in Thailand led by Siriraj Hospital. Prominent clinicians who are also a part of the partnership include Prof. MG Bousser (France), Prof. G Donnan (Australia) Prof. Chen (Singapore) Prof. Nippon (Thailand), Prof. Navarro (Philippines), and Prof. Asita (Sri Lanka). The partnership has enabled Moleac to identify the potential of Eastern world therapeutics in Western worlds.

Major breakthroughs

Moleac's first product, Neuroaid, now marketed in more than 30 countries, continues to undergo clinical trials to extend its indications. The company has published four scientific papers related to Neuroaid in clinical trials and its pharmacology.

In a short period, since its launch, Neuroaid has become a product with global reach. It has witnessed considerable geographic expansion outside Singapore as it is now available in many countries in the Asia Pacific region, the Middle East, Europe and the US.

Moleac has increased its employee strength from four in 2007 to 20 so as to reach out to the needy patients globally. It also opened two subsidiaries in Europe. The company has completed two rounds of financing in 2008 and 2009, for a combined amount of \$4.7 million. The successful launch of the product in Singapore and in other parts of the world has generated sales of \$2.11 million.

Commenting on future plans, Mr David Picard, CEO, Moleac, says, "Our main focus will be to increase revenues and extend geographic footage. We will also expand our clinical trial scope to dementia and cognitive impairment, by including centers in Western Europe. Finally implement research on simplification of mixtures to identify the active compounds in Neuroaid mixture."

On receiving the BioSpectrum Asia Pacific Emerging Company of the Year 2010 Award, Mr David Picard says, "We are very happy about our progress towards bringing therapeutics to meet the needs of the sufferers and we are proud of these efforts being recognized by BioSpectrum. Thank you very much for your encouragement and support," he concludes.