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Singapore: Singapore's ASLAN pharmaceuticals recently announced that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has granted orphan drug designation to its pan-HER inhibitor ASLAN001 (varlitinib), a drug candidate created to treat a destructive form of bile duct cancer called cholangiocarcinoma that has no known cure.

The company said in a statement, "Cholangiocarcinoma is a very rare cancer, but one of the big killers in Asia. We became excited by some cases with remarkable responses in patients with cholangiocarcinoma taking part in our earlier studies with ASLAN001."

Cholangiocarcinoma is a form of cancer that is composed of mutated epithelial cells (or cells showing characteristics of epithelialdifferentiation) that originate in the bile ducts which drain bile from the liver into the small intestine. These growths can appear anywhere in bile ducts, although many tend to be in advanced stages by the time they are discovered. Jaundice, chills, and fever are just some of the symptoms patients experience.

The company's press release indicates that ASLAN001 is currently undergoing phase 2 studies for breast cancer and cholangiocarcinoma with more studies being planned to analyze its effects on gastric cancer.