THE Pitch

Kinex Pharmaceuticals

Kinex Pharmaceuticals
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History

Viewed as an authority in the field of structure based drug design, David Hangauer, Ph.D. spent ten years in industry conducting research for Merck Sharp and Dohme. In 1989 he returned to academia and focused his work on protein kinase inhibitors. His composition of work since has formed the solid scientific foundation upon which Buffalo-based drug discovery and development company Kinex Pharmaceutials rests.

After twelve years of intense laboratory work, Dr. Hangauer's project had reached the commercial scale up stage. The technology was also successful in attracting significant players in the industry. In 2002, Kinex's senior management team began to take shape including former Schering Plough VP of Technology Acquisition and External Collaborations, Allen Barnett, Ph.D. as CEO, and successful Buffalo biotech entrepreneur Lyn Dyster, Ph.D., as VP of Operations. Shortly after, the fledgling company secured an exclusive option to commercialize the University at Buffalo Src kinase inhibitors technology that Dr. Hangauer had been developing.

In 2003, Kinex gained a further advantage through the recruitment of Johnson Lau, MD (former Ribapharm CEO) as Board Chairman. Dr. Lau brought additional industry contacts in private funding and the corporate development skills necessary to assist in the growth of an early stage company. This year, Kinex Pharmaceuticals was officially launched and is out of the gate strong.

The Technology

Currently many pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies have active programs directed at the discovery of small molecule protein kinase inhibitors for a variety of diseases. Kinex is also focused on this hot field, but with a key differentiating factor that sets it apart from its competitors. The vast majority of protein kinase inhibitor programs are targeting the same binding cavity that the co-substrate ATP binds to. This approach has been more successful than originally expected but still suffers from important deficiencies, such as the development of resistance in the case of kinase inhibitors for the treatment of cancer.

Kinex has obtained an exclusive license to a proprietary new platform technology that produces small molecule protein kinase inhibitors that bind in the peptide substrate cavity. This has been a long sought goal in the kinase inhibitor field, but Kinex is set apart by being the only company to have this technology along with a variety of promising novel small molecule protein kinase inhibitors developed with it. Since

these compounds target a different binding cavity on the kinase their chemical structures are quite different from the families of compounds that bind in the ATP site. This provides Kinex with less crowded intellectual property space and a different chemical and biological profile for their compounds relative to the ATP competitive inhibitors. These non-ATP competitive small molecule kinase inhibitors are expected to be less prone to the development of resistance in oncology applications, more selective, have and to have an improved toxicology profile.

Looking Ahead

Kinex has developed small molecule lead compounds that are potent in inhibiting the growth of cancer cells. The company is in the process of synthesizing additional derivatives to optimize in vivo activity. The plan calls for at least one compound to be ready for preclinical IND studies by the end of 2004 and in the clinic by the end of 2005.

Although the company's current focus is on Src kinase inhibitors for a variety of tumors, CEO Allen Barnett, Ph.D. adds, "Kinex's platform technology is fully capable of providing leads for other kinase targets and other clinical indications, such as osteoporosis and ischemic disorders".

To date, Kinex has been financially supported by the founders and other private investors. The company claims to have enough of a financial stockpile to carry it through the choice of compound(s) for IND. Additional funding will be necessary to support the IND program as well as early clinical trials.

Currently, Kinex is operating as a virtual company (having been officially launched in August 2004) that has already made a great deal of progress through the judicious use of seed money. The intention of the senior management team is to start building out a full company with funds raised from their first corporate collaboration.

For further information on

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