

Gilead Sciences, WHO join hands to tackle kala azar

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Gilead Sciences, a biopharmaceutical company headquartered in Foster City, California, will donate 445,000 vials of AmBisome (amphotericin B liposome for injection) to help the World Health Organization (WHO) treat more than 50,000 patients with visceral leishmaniasis (VL), also known as kala azar.

Under its five-year initiative with the WHO, the donation of \$8 million by Gilead Sciences for VL treatment, 'AmBisome' is expected to reach 50,000 people in resource-limited countries, including India. Visceral leishmaniasis is widespread in South Asia and the Horn of Africa, where it affects hundreds of thousands of people annually. Without treatment, the mortality rate is close to 100 percent.

In the Indian subcontinent, where VL is endemic, the WHO Leishmaniasis Expert Committee recommends single-dose AmBisome as the safest and most-effective treatment for the disease. AmBisome is approved for treatment of VL in the US as well.

Advinus completes study on GK-activator

Advinus Therapeutics, promoted by the TATA Group, has successfully completed a 14-day proof-of-concept (POC) study on 60 type 2 diabetic patients for its lead molecule, GKM-001, a glucokinase activator. The results of the trial show effective glucose lowering across all doses tested without any incidence of hypoglycemia or any other clinically relevant adverse events.

The clinical trials on GKM-001 validate the company's pre-clinical hypothesis that a liver selective glucokinase activator would not cause hypoglycemia (very low blood sugar), while showing robust efficacy. "GKM-001 is differentiated from most

other GK molecules that are in development, or have been discontinued, due to its novel liver selective mechanism of action. GKM-001 has a prolonged pharmacological effect and a half-life that should support a once-a-day dosing as both mono and combination therapy,” said Dr Rashmi Barbhaiya, MD & CEO, Advinus Therapeutics. He added that Advinus is actively exploring partnership options to expedite further development and global marketing of GKM-001.

inStem signs MoU with CIRM The Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine (inStem), an autonomous research institute funded by the Department of Biotechnology, recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) for supporting collaborative research projects between outstanding stem cell scientists in India and California.

Under this request for applications, inStem plans to commit up to 5.225 crore (\$1 million) per annum to support up to five collaborative projects involving Indian teams, approved for award by the CIRM. The CIRM intends to commit up to \$35 million to support up to 25 awards. Projects will be funded for up to three years, with justifiable direct project costs of up to 15.75 lakh (\$300,000) per year (California component). Under the terms of the agreement, the CIRM and inStem have announced the CIRM Basic Biology IV Awards. The objective is to foster cutting-edge research tackling significant and unresolved issues in human stem cell biology. Studies should focus on elucidating basic molecular and cellular mechanisms and should utilize pluripotent stem cells, adult stem cells, and/or their differentiated derivatives.

ICAR celebrates Indo-US partnership To mark the 60 years of fruitful Indo-US collaboration in agricultural research, the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) organized an event at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi campus, on December 20.

The theme, 'Agricultural Research and Innovation', highlighted the importance of the establishment of South Asian Universities in rapid adoptions of Green Revolution technologies developed by the IARI in collaboration with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research Institutions. The speakers noted that the area under wheat nearly doubled and the production tripled within the first decade of the Green Revolution due to the collaborative work.

Dr Rajiv Shah, the administrator of the USAID, Dr MS Swaminathan, member of Parliament and chairman of MS Swaminathan Foundation, Dr S Ayyappan, secretary, DARE, and DG, ICAR, and Dr H S Gupta, director, IARI, were the speakers. “Since that first partnership over half a century ago, the relationship between our two nations has transformed dramatically, delivering meaningful results,” said Dr Rajiv Shah.