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# Merck, ICR, Wellcome Trust to co-develop cancer drugs

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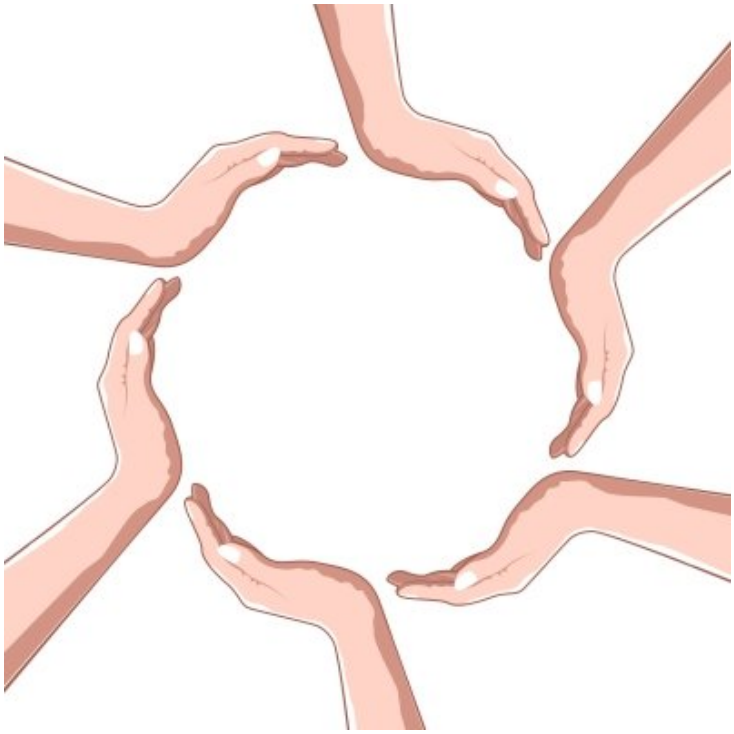

Merck Serono, the biopharmaceutical division of Merck, The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR), and the Wellcome Trust has announced a co-development and license agreement to identify inhibitors of tankyrase, an enzyme of the poly (ADP-ribose) polymerase family (PARP). Some of the most promising advances in cancer research have been small-molecule inhibitors of PARP enzymes.

The collaboration will be jointly funded by Merck Serono and the Wellcome Trust.

In a joint effort, a team led by Dr Chris Lord and Professor Alan Ashworth at the ICR and a research group at Merck Serono will aim to progress chemical compounds that have emerged from both organisations' tankyrase inhibitor programs towards clinical development. At the end of the collaboration period, Merck Serono will take over full responsibility for the selected clinical development candidate, with the goal of bringing a new cancer therapeutic drug to patients.

Dr Chris Lord, team leader in the division of breast cancer research at ICR said, "Tankyrase inhibitors provide a unique opportunity to target one of the most common characteristics of cancer cells - their dependency on the so-called 'Wnt signaling' pathway. Both Merck Serono and the group at the ICR have already made notable progress in developing tankyrase inhibitors. Working with Merck Serono will allow us to jointly accelerate our program with the aim to ultimately make tankyrase inhibitors available to cancer patients."

"We are delighted to work together with Dr Chris Lord and Professor Alan Ashworth. With this partnership, we aim to harness the already well advanced tankyrase programs at both ICR and Merck Serono and hope to ultimately translate these in to novel treatment options for cancer patients. We will build on a joint compound base of potent tankyrase inhibitors and will leverage both sites' scientific knowledge about the 'Wnt pathway' that plays a major role in signal transduction for tumor growth", said Dr Andree Blaukat, head of the translational innovation platform oncology at Merck Serono. He added, Â "The interest of the Wellcome Trust shows its belief in our researchers' scientific data. It also shows the importance of academia-industry collaboration models in pharmaceutical development to progress the most promising investigational compounds into clinics with the aim of bringing them to patients."

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Dr Ted Bianco, director of innovations at the Wellcome Trust said, "We welcome the strategic collaboration with Merck Serono, which brings together a world-leading academic drug discovery group, and an industry partner with such a strong commitment to oncology, to give the program the best possible chances of success."

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