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AstraZeneca (AZ) has announced that it has entered into an agreement with Abbott to develop companion diagnostic tests, to identify patients with severe asthma who are most likely to benefit from the investigational biological therapy, tralokinumab. To date, no companion diagnostic blood tests have been approved for use in asthma.

Under the terms of the agreement, Abbott will develop and commercialize the diagnostic tests to measure serum levels of the proteins periostin and DPP4 (dipeptidyl peptidase-4), which have been identified as potential predictive biomarkers of up-regulated IL-13 in severe asthma. The tests will be developed in conjunction with AZ's Phase III trial of tralokinumab, a potential treatment for patients with severe, inadequately controlled asthma, developed by the company's biologics research and development arm, MedImmune. Periostin has been previously described as a potential biomarker for asthma1, and DPP4 is a novel and promising predictive biomarker identified by MedImmune.

The tralokinumab Phase III program will evaluate the safety and effectiveness of tralokinumab in reducing the rate of asthma exacerbations in adults and adolescents with severe, inadequately controlled asthma despite receiving inhaled corticosteroids plus long-acting Î²2-agonist. The program will also assess the effect of tralokinumab on lung function, patient-reported asthma symptoms and quality of life, as well as investigate whether serum periostin or DPP4 could identify patients who are most likely to benefit from tralokinumab.

Mr Bing Yao, senior vice-president and head of MedImmune's Respiratory, Inflammation and Autoimmunity Innovative Medicines Unit said, "This partnership with Abbott to develop companion diagnostics for tralokinumab is an important step in delivering on our ambition to bring innovative options for patients who continue to suffer with severe asthma. We anticipate that physicians will ultimately use these tests to better identify patients likely to benefit most from tralokinumab to bring their condition under control. We are on the cusp of a new era in personalized healthcare, one which will see great improvements for patients treated with respiratory medicines."

Personalized healthcare is at the center of AZ's approach to drug discovery and development and this collaboration is a part of the company's strategy to seek external partners to develop companion diagnostics that will help transform patients' lives.