

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Duke-NUS commercialises discovery to deliver therapeutics across blood brain barrier

Singapore, 1 March 2018 – Intellectual property (IP) derived from discoveries made at Duke-NUS Medical School (Duke-NUS) have been licensed to a newly formed biotech start-up, Travecta Therapeutics Pte Ltd, a Singapore-based drug discovery company. Travecta plans to use the Duke-NUS technology to develop new therapeutic agents that can be selectively delivered across the blood brain barrier for treatment of diseases of the brain, eye and central nervous system.

The license agreement between Duke-NUS and Travecta was facilitated by the Duke-NUS' Centre for Technology and Development (CTeD), which is part of an innovation and entrepreneurship initiative focused on commercializing research carried out at Duke-NUS.

In 2014, Duke-NUS' Professor David Silver published research that, for the first time, established a path and transport system that specifically takes lipids such as docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), an omega-3 fatty acids that are critical for brain development, to the brain. Professor Silver discovered that a transporter protein called Mfsd2a carries DHA in the chemical form of lyso-phosphatidylcholine (LPC) to the brain.

Travecta Therapeutics was born from these findings and founded by Professor Silver, Dr Michael Schleifer and Mr Laurent Benissan from Sprim, a leading global health research and information consulting firm. To support its development, Travecta is backed by TKS I, a healthcare and life science focused venture fund by Tikehau Investment Management in Singapore, a strategic investment arm of Tikehau Capital, which manages €12.6bn of assets under management.

Travecta plans to develop an Mfsd2a-directed drug delivery platform that can efficiently and selectively transport drugs to the brain for improved treatment with reduced side effects. The company plans to work with biotech and major pharmaceutical companies to use its technology for testing and improving the transport of existing molecules.

“The pathway we found can be exploited to deliver new or existing drugs which have proven ineffective due to their lack of transport across the blood brain barrier,” explained Professor Silver, who is also Deputy Director of the Cardiovascular and Metabolic Diseases Programme at Duke-NUS and scientific founder of Travecta. “The blood brain barrier prevents more than 98% of small molecule drugs from entering the brain.”

CTeD and Professor Silver have worked together for the past several years to develop and commercialise this important technology.

Duke-NUS' Vice Dean of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Professor David M. Epstein said, “developing a platform around the LPC and Mfsd2a transport system for targeted drug delivery represents among the best of our bench-to-bedside innovations. We are confident that Travecta has the capabilities to develop this technology to its full potential. The financial backing for Travecta from a global investment firm like Tikehau Capital and Sprim is a strong testament of confidence that investment communities have in our research and discovery.”

“The commercialisation of Professor Silver’s discovery via licensing of relevant IP outlines a significant milestone in the fundamental biomedical research conducted at Duke-NUS. I look forward to seeing better therapeutics and improved health outcomes through this platform,” added Duke-NUS’ Senior Vice Dean of Research Professor Patrick Casey.

“Travecta, with its unique transport technology, can produce scalable results in new drug discoveries which are immediately transmittable to its pharmaceutical partners, while developing an important internal drug pipeline for diseases which have no cure,” said Mr Benissan.

About Duke-NUS Medical School

The Duke-NUS Medical School (Duke-NUS) was established in 2005 as a strategic collaboration between the Duke University School of Medicine, located in North Carolina, USA, and the National University of Singapore (NUS). Duke-NUS offers a graduate-entry, 4-year MD (Doctor of Medicine) training programme based on the unique Duke model of education, with one year dedicated to independent study and research projects of a basic science or clinical nature. Duke-NUS also offers MD/PhD and PhD programmes. Duke-NUS has five Signature Research Programmes: Cancer and Stem Cell Biology, Neuroscience and Behavioural Disorders, Emerging Infectious Diseases, Cardiovascular and Metabolic Disorders, and Health Services and Systems Research.

Duke-NUS and SingHealth have established a strategic partnership in academic medicine that will guide and promote the future of medicine, tapping on and combining the collective strengths of SingHealth’s clinical expertise and Duke-NUS’ biomedical sciences research and medical education capabilities.

For more information, please visit www.duke-nus.edu.sg

About Sprim

Sprim is a global innovation firm focused on healthcare. With a team of 600 professionals and 19 offices globally, our team transforms the newest opportunities and breakthroughs in health into business and marketing realities for companies and brands every day. Sprim is a unique integrated service model combining consulting, agency and CRO. After 17 years in business, Sprim offers its services to over 450 customers around the globe. Further information can be found at www.sprim.com.

About Tikehau Capital

Tikehau Capital is an asset management and investment group which manages €12.6bn of assets, with shareholders' equity of €2.3bn. The group invests in various asset classes (private debt, real estate, private equity and liquid strategies), through its asset management subsidiary Tikehau IM, on behalf of institutional and private investors. Controlled by its managers, alongside leading institutional partners, Tikehau Capital employs 185 staff in its Paris, London, Brussels, Madrid, Milan, Seoul and Singapore offices.

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