



## Press Release

**17 August 2009, New consortium to develop drugs for neglected tropical diseases**

**A new consortium has been formed to boost drug development for the treatment of two deadly diseases, African sleeping sickness and Leishmaniasis, which affect millions of people worldwide. A total budget of nearly 3.6 million euros has been allocated over the next 4 years, to develop effective drugs for these diseases. The consortium includes IOTA Pharmaceuticals, Mercachem, Nycomed, the Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative, the Royal Tropical Institute, the University of Bern, the VU University Amsterdam and TI Pharma.**

Rob Leurs (VU University Amsterdam), the project's principal investigator, comments: *"African sleeping sickness and Leishmaniasis are diseases caused by parasites. Both diseases are prominent on the World Health Organization's list of neglected tropical diseases for which no effective medication is available."* The new consortium will target parasite-specific phosphodiesterase to develop and screen drug candidates for clinical evaluation and the treatment of both diseases. Leurs continues: *"This new project combines the knowledge and experience of leading European laboratories and promises to make a major contribution to the treatment of neglected tropical diseases."*

### **African sleeping sickness**

Recent WHO estimates indicate that approximately 60 million people are at risk of contracting the African sleeping sickness (also called human African trypanosomiasis) with an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 new cases occurring each year. The disease appears in 36 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and is endemic in south-east Uganda and western Kenya, killing more than 40,000 Africans each year. The African sleeping sickness parasite, most commonly *Trypanosoma brucei*, is transmitted to humans by tsetse fly bites.

### **Leishmaniasis**

Leishmaniasis is found in many tropical and sub-tropical countries, in settings as diverse as the rainforests in Central and South America to deserts in Asia and the Middle East. 350 million people are at risk of developing the disease, with as many as 12 million people worldwide being infected, and 1.5–2 million new cases occurring each year. Leishmaniasis presents in cutaneous, visceral and mucosal forms, with the visceral form of the disease alone having an estimated incidence of 500,000 new cases each year, and causing 60,000 deaths. Many different



Leishmania species are implicated in the disease, which is transmitted by sand flies.

### **Neglected diseases framework**

Neglected diseases such as African Sleeping Sickness, Leishmaniasis and Malaria, represent a major economic burden on developing countries. Within its project portfolio, TI Pharma is seeking to develop solutions to these diseases, mobilizing public and private partners in multilateral consortia – bringing together a wide range of competences and resources. This new project on phosphodiesterase is TI Pharma's sixth initiative in neglected diseases. Other projects focus on:

- the development of a protective malaria vaccine;
- a 'proof of concept' vaccine for Chikungunya;
- an effective HIV therapy;
- drug formulations that can resist tropical conditions without refrigeration for both oxytocin and insulin as well as vaccines for hepatitis B and influenza;
- fixed dose combinations of formulations for drugs, applicable to combination therapies in many diseases, including neglected diseases.

For more information on TI Pharma's projects on neglected diseases, please visit [www.tipharma.com/research/priority-medicines/neglected-diseases](http://www.tipharma.com/research/priority-medicines/neglected-diseases).

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The **Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative** (DNDi) is a not-for-profit product development partnership founded in 2003 by five publicly-funded research organizations – Brazil's Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, the Indian Council of Medical Research, Kenya Medical Research Institute, the Malaysian Ministry of Health, and Institut Pasteur, an international research organization – along with WHO's Tropical Diseases Research program as a permanent observer and the international humanitarian organization, Médecins Sans Frontières. DNDi has developed the largest R&D portfolio for kinetoplastid diseases ever and, with its partners, has already made three new treatments for neglected diseases available. For further information, please visit [www.dndi.org](http://www.dndi.org).

**IOTA Pharmaceuticals** is a privately-owned drug discovery company, providing structure-based molecular design, compound screening and lead development services to its partners in the pharmaceutical industry. IOTA specialises in fragment-based drug discovery (FBDD), applying its proprietary FBDD technology to produce selective drugs from commercially relevant gene families, which include the phosphodiesterases. We work with clients on a target-exclusive basis, providing access to our proprietary technology and considerable pharmaceutical discovery experience within the framework of dedicated Drug Discovery Partnerships (DDPs). For more information about IOTA, please visit [www.iotapharma.com](http://www.iotapharma.com).

**Mercachem** is a privately owned, independent contract research organization offering innovative organic chemistry, medicinal chemistry and process R&D services to accelerate the drug discovery and development process in a flexible and cost-effective way. Mercachem was founded in 1997, occupies 3,500m<sup>2</sup> state-of-the-art research facilities in Nijmegen and employs more than 100 chemists. Working for major pharmaceutical and biotech companies throughout the world,



Mercachem is recognized for its high-quality products and services and its unprecedented problem-solving capabilities. More information on Mercachem can be found on the company website ([www.mercachem.com](http://www.mercachem.com)).

**Nycomed** is a privately owned global pharmaceutical company with a differentiated portfolio focused on branded medicines in gastroenterology, respiratory and inflammatory diseases, pain, osteoporosis and tissue management. An extensive range of OTC products completes the portfolio. Its R&D is structured around partnerships and in-licensing is a cornerstone of the company's growth strategy. Nycomed employs 12,000 associates worldwide, and its products are available in more than 100 countries. It has strong platforms in Europe and in fast-growing markets such as Russia/CIS and Latin America. While the US and Japan are commercialised through best-in-class partners, Nycomed plans to further strengthen its own position in key Asian markets. Headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland, the company generated total sales of €3.4 billion in 2008 and an adjusted EBITDA of €1.2 billion. For more information visit [www.nycomed.com](http://www.nycomed.com)

The **Royal Tropical Institute (KIT)** in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, is an independent center for knowledge and expertise for international cooperation. The institute works on sustainable development, poverty reduction, improvement of health and cultural preservation. KIT is a not-for-profit organization that works for both the public and the private sector in collaboration with partners in the Netherlands and abroad. KIT Biomedical Research (KIT BR) aims to contribute to the health of people living in low and medium income countries. It does so by carrying out a range of activities focused on detection and control of infection and disease with an emphasis on applied, translational and implementation research that aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of health services. ([www.kit.nl](http://www.kit.nl))

**University of Bern** offers top quality across the board: it enjoys special recognition in leading-edge disciplines, is reputed for the excellent quality of its teaching, offers a delightful setting, and a campus environment intimately linked to the social, economic and political life of the city of Bern. Its academic and research organization prides itself on its interdisciplinarity and is actively involved in a wide range of European and worldwide research projects. [www.unibe.de](http://www.unibe.de)

**VU University Amsterdam**, with its excellent educational and research programs brings together talents from a wide range of disciplines and from many different countries. For VU University Amsterdam academic endeavor is more valuable when it makes a contribution to our world. VU University is one of the founding fathers of TI Pharma and has a longstanding tradition in education and research in the area of Drug Discovery. For further information, visit [www.vuamsterdam.com/home/index.cfm](http://www.vuamsterdam.com/home/index.cfm).

Within **Top Institute Pharma (TI Pharma)**, consortia of industrial and academic research teams conduct groundbreaking, cross-disciplinary research projects that fit into the Priority Medicines program of the WHO. Each year, the Dutch government funds the top institute to the tune of 30 million euros. The pharmaceutical industry and academia each contribute an additional 15 million euros per year. TI Pharma is becoming an international leader in (bio)pharmaceutical research, training and education. TI Pharma's fellows are trained in understanding the intricacies of the entire drug R&D process. For further information, visit [www.tipharma.com](http://www.tipharma.com).