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Pfizer And University College London Announce Collaboration To Advance Development Of Stem Cell-Based Therapies

Goal of Collaboration Between Pfizer Regenerative Medicine and UCL is the Development of Treatment for Macular Degeneration

CAMBRIDGE, England--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Pfizer Regenerative Medicine today announced that it has entered into a collaboration and license agreement with University College London focused on gaining better understanding into how to develop stem cell-based therapies for certain ophthalmic conditions.

The Pfizer/UCL collaboration brings together the pioneering work of university researchers in the field of cell-based therapies and Pfizer's expertise in the design and delivery of therapeutics. Pfizer's contributions will include expertise in the design and execution of clinical studies and interaction with global regulators as well as in product manufacturing techniques. The collaboration will examine how human embryonic stem (hES) cells differentiate into retinal pigment epithelium (RPE) with the goal of developing stem cell-based therapies primarily for wet and dry macular degeneration (AMD).

"We are excited to be working with pioneers in the field of stem cell ophthalmology from UCL," said Ruth McKernan, PhD, Chief Scientific Officer of Pfizer Regenerative Medicine. "While we have much to learn about how stem cells can be used therapeutically, we are confident that this relationship will increase that understanding and help us advance to a time when our work may benefit patients worldwide."

Under the terms of the agreement, Pfizer will provide funding to UCL to enable research into the development of stem cell-based therapies for AMD as well as other retinal diseases. Pfizer is granted exclusive worldwide rights to develop and commercialize an RPE stem cell-based therapeutic in the ophthalmology field. After the completion of preclinical safety studies, Pfizer will have the option to conduct clinical trials to determine efficacy of treatment and commercialize any resulting product.

Pfizer is a leader in the development and marketing of medical therapies for ophthalmologic disease and has active efforts in retinal diseases, glaucoma and dry eye syndrome. The alliance with UCL will help Pfizer to remain at the leading edge of research into new therapies for ophthalmic disease.

"We have not only the benefit of Pfizer's experience of the regulatory process and their expertise in stem cell technology but the ability, if this works, to produce on a much larger scale. It has huge implications, not only for our project, but for the field of regenerative medicine as a whole. And it is great that Britain is at the forefront of this research," said Professor Pete Coffey, UCL Institute for Ophthalmology and Director of the London Project.

In November 2008, Pfizer launched the Pfizer Regenerative Medicine research unit. This independent research organization will build on Pfizer's years of experience in this field and recent scientific progress in understanding the biology of stem cells and the opportunity it provides to discover and develop a new generation of medicines for major medical needs. Initial research in this area by Pfizer was focused on the development in drug discovery tools and now expands into developing a new generation of regenerative medicines for major medical needs that could benefit millions of patients worldwide.

The agreement with UCL adds to a range of collaborations and licenses with public and private institutes involving experts in this emerging area of biomedical research, of which Pfizer is at the forefront. These collaborations support the evaluation of alternative cell sources, explore the control of stem cells with small molecules and seek to optimize the production of certain cell types for potential use as therapies.

These collaborations place Pfizer at the cutting edge of efforts in the field of regenerative medicines and support the company's goal to be a leader in the discovery and development of biotherapeutics and in bringing life-changing medicines to patients in need.

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