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Funding to Aid Development of Skin Cancer Therapy

A consortium of experts has won a significant grant to develop a novel regenerative medicine product to help skin cancer patients.

EktoTherix™, a bioresorbable scaffold material that assists patient tissue repair and regeneration, has been developed by Neotherix Limited supported by Lorien Engineering Solutions and Smith & Nephew Advanced Wound Management. Matrix Knowledge Group also joined the consortium to provide economic evaluation for the new product into clinical practice. The consortium has secured 50% funding for the £345,000 project from the Technology Strategy Board to take the therapy to the next stage of development. This follows an earlier feasibility project grant made to Neotherix by the Board in 2009.

The product works by applying a patch of EktoTherix™ following excision of the basal or squamous cell carcinoma by the clinician, and this rapidly allows the wound space to be filled with (and then covered by) the patients' own skin cells. The product is formed via an electrospinning process, and the highly porous three-dimensional scaffold structure supports the migration and proliferation of fibroblast cells from surrounding healthy skin tissue to facilitate healing of the wound.

This innovative treatment provides an aesthetically acceptable repair to the skin, avoids the need to either graft donor skin tissue from elsewhere on the patient or have an extended healing process with regular dressing changes with an increased risk of infection, and provides a convenient and cost-effective treatment for dermatologists and surgeons.

Neotherix' initial clinical target concerns the post-surgical treatment of non-melanoma skin cancers. Further clinical applications are expected. Mike Raxworthy, CEO of York-based Neotherix said: "This Technology Strategy Board funded project will continue the development of the product towards full commercialisation. It will allow us to conduct confirmatory preclinical testing for efficacy and safety, perform GMP production trials and explore the patient pathway including the initial stage of a clinical economic evaluation. On completion of this project our aim is to conduct a clinical evaluation of the product, with an estimated market launch in late 2012. The estimated global market for this product is £360m per annum."

Midlands-based Lorien Engineering Solutions is assisting in the development of the commercialisation pathway for the product. In particular, Lorien is leading

the definition of GMP manufacturing requirements and manufacturing risk evaluation which will be required by regulatory authorities. Lorien's life sciences director Bill Treddenick said: "This grant award is fantastic news for the project as the product has the potential to greatly improve patient outcomes during non-melanoma skin cancer excisions. Lorien is delighted to be part of such a successful consortium of companies working in the regenerative medicine arena, and in particular to be able to continue our involvement with Mike Raxworthy and colleagues at Neotherix following completion of the Technology Strategy Board-funded feasibility project earlier this year."

Commenting on the grant awards for regenerative medicine projects, Iain Gray, the Technology Strategy Board's Chief Executive, said: "Regenerative medicine has already provided significant medical advances in areas such as skin regeneration for burns patients, and it has the potential to offer cures and treatments with long-term benefits. The UK is a world leader in this area, with a strong science base. For us to fulfil our potential in this field, a number of development challenges need to be overcome, so that British businesses – and the wider economy – can benefit from the successful commercial exploitation of promising discoveries."

The investment in EktoTherix™ is part of a £21.5m programme of competitions, managed by the Technology Strategy Board, in the area of regenerative medicine. Launched in September 2009, the programme is supported by the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). In January 2010 the Board announced its first investments through the programme, with 31 feasibility studies receiving £2.8m of funding while three major collaborative research and development projects received £2.3m. The Board announced a further investment in July 2010 with 16 research and development projects and 12 feasibility studies sharing £5.1m.

See the full Neotherix press release.

Links to Lorien Engineering Solutions, Matrix Knowledge Group, Smith & Nephew and the Technology Strategy Board

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