

Zydus and WHO to develop next-generation biologicals to fight rabies

Ahmedabad, August 12, 2008

Zydus Cadila has entered into an agreement with WHO to explore a possible collaboration in the development of a cocktail for the treatment of rabies, through the use of monoclonal antibodies (MAbs), the next-generation biologicals.

Rabies is a viral disease which often gets transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The virus infects the central nervous system, causing encephalopathy (disease of the brain) and ultimately death, if medical treatment is not sought before the symptoms appear. Rabies is prevalent globally across Europe, Asia, America and Africa. Globally, approximately 10 million people each year are treated after exposure to rabies. Some 40,000 to 70,000 people die of the disease each year, mainly in Africa, China and India.

The therapy, if developed and commercialized, could herald a new approach in the fight against this fatal disease. Currently, there is no treatment for rabies once the symptoms of the disease have appeared. Post exposure prophylaxis for severe bites requires both active immunization, using vaccines and passive immunization in the form of rabies immunoglobulins (RIG). These immunoglobulins are derived from the blood serum and pose a problem in the treatment as they are often in short supply.

Rabies monoclonal antibodies (MAbs) are expected to be an innovative therapy and can emerge as a potent alternative. While the rabies vaccine induces active immunity, the Rabies monoclonal antibodies can be safely administered with the vaccine to provide immediate passive neutralizing activity.

The agreement is a broad-based one which includes evaluation and provides a possible stepping-stone for the development and commercialization of the cocktail, to be used as an adjuvant therapy. The World Health Organization will be providing monoclonal antibodies capable of neutralizing rabies virus and genetic sequences thereof, for evaluation at the Zydus Research Centre, Zydus' state-of-the-art research arm. The development and commercialization of the cocktail will inter alia be designed to achieve the wide availability of the cocktail to the public, including in particular its availability to the public sector of developing countries at a preferential price.

Describing the initiative as an important mission, the Chairman and Managing Director of Zydus Cadila Mr. Pankaj R. Patel said, "Any effort that is taken to fight rabies is a big step for mankind. We welcome this opportunity. This new therapy, if developed, holds much promise as it will address a critical need and will enable us to offer the complete range of rabies therapeutics at an affordable cost." Zydus currently manufactures and markets Rabies Vaccines - VaxiRab and Lyssavac N. The group has also developed a new cell culture vaccine which will be used for both intramuscular and intradermal vaccination.

Zydus Cadila has a team of more than 900 research professionals spearheading its research and development programme of which 350 scientists alone are involved in the New Molecular Entity (NME) research programme at the Zydus Research Centre.

###