

EMERGING COMPANY PROFILE

Quell: tweaking Tregs for persistence, potency and stability

BY STEPHEN HANSEN, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

London-based Quell is among a new generation of companies springboarding off advances in CAR T cells and gene editing to develop more targeted Treg cell therapies with enhanced persistence, potency and stability.

On Thursday, Quell Therapeutics Ltd.'s founding investor, Syncona Ltd. (LSE:SYNC), led the close of an expanded series A round that should give the biotech enough runway to advance its lead cell therapy into the clinic and shore up its manufacturing capabilities.

The investment brought the total series A to £61 million (\$83.6 million), with Syncona investing £25.3 million in the new tranche for a 74% stake and UCL Technology Fund committing \$1 million. The two investors had already invested £35 million in the series A round in 2019.

Syncona launched the company in 2019 in partnership with six founders from King's College London, University College London (UCL) and Hannover Medical School with backgrounds in TRegs, cell engineering, solid organ transplantation and autoimmune diseases and CEO Iain McGill leading the management team. McGill joined from Jazz Pharmaceuticals plc (NASDAQ:JAZZ), where he was head of Europe and rest of world overseeing ex-U.S. operations.

McGill said the new cash will get lead program QEL-001, a CAR Treg cell therapy directed against HLA-A2, through a Phase I trial in liver transplant patients. The therapy, which is slated to begin Phase I testing in 1H22, is likely to become the second CAR Treg therapy to enter the clinic.

Sangamo Therapeutics Inc. (NASDAQ:SGMO) has said it expects TX200, its CAR Treg therapy against the same target, to enter the clinic in 2H21 to prevent kidney transplant rejection.

First generation regulatory T cell therapies for autoimmune diseases failed to advance because the unmodified cells weren't potent enough and were difficult to isolate and expand.

McGill isn't disclosing details around the technologies underlying Quell's next-generation CAR Treg platform, but he did say the company's technology addresses a key safety concern with the ability to lock cells into the Treg suppressive phenotype.

"What you don't want is the Tregs becoming T effector cells,

COMPANY PROFILE

Quell Therapeutics Ltd.

London, U.K.

Technology: CAR Treg cell therapy platform

Origin of technology: King's College London, University College London and Hannover Medical School

Disease focus: Autoimmune, neuroinflammation and transplant

Clinical status: Preclinical

Founded: 2019 by Giovanna Lombardi, Alberto Sanchez-Fueyo, Elmar Jaeckel, Hans Stauss, Emma Morris, Marc Martinez-Llordella, Iain McGill

Academic collaborators: King's College London, University College London and Hannover Medical School

Corporate partners: Biomedical Research Center at Guys & St. Thomas NHS Foundation Trust

Number of employees: 70

Funds raised: £61 million (\$83.6 million)

Investors: Syncona Ltd., UCL Technology Fund

CEO: Iain McGill

Patents: None issued

and then you've weaponized them with a CAR," McGill said. "The combination of the two could be disastrous, so we believe locking them in the suppressive phenotype is a really important component of safety."

He added that Quell also has technologies to install kill switches in the therapy, and strategies for improving both their potency and persistence through cell engineering.

McGill said the expanded A round also will enable Quell to establish a "robust and scalable manufacturing process" and progress two earlier stage programs for Type I diabetes and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

TARGETS

HLA-A2 - Major histocompatibility complex class I A 2

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