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Instant Pipeline

Synosis Therapeutics Inc. is looking to develop small molecules for neurological indications that have been put on the shelf by larger pharma companies. Last week, the company took in five compounds from Roche in its first in-licensing deal.

Synosis (South San Francisco, Calif.) was spun out of EuroVentures Inc., an incubator wholly owned by Versant Ventures, in early 2006. The company was formally launched this month after raising \$32.5 million in December in a series A round through Versant; 5AM Ventures; Abingworth; and Novo A/S.

President and CEO Ian Massey said the company's goal is to in-license from pharma companies a portfolio of deprioritized small molecules that have safety data in preclinical models and humans, as well as a mechanism of action that fits the company's focus on anxiety, Parkinson's disease (PD), cognition, pain and schizophrenia.

Under the deal with Roche (SWX:ROG, Basel, Switzerland), Synosis received exclusive worldwide rights to five oral compounds that the pharma had been developing for neurological and other undisclosed indications. According to Massey, the former SVP and head of research and preclinical development at ROG's unit in Palo Alto, Calif., the compounds did not have any kind of setback, but were just not a priority.

Four of the compounds have completed Phase I testing: SYN-114, a serotonin (5-HT₆) receptor antagonist for cognitive disorders; SYN-115, an adenosine A_{2A} receptor inhibitor for PD; SYN-116, a prostaglandin I₂ (PGI₂) antagonist for acute pain; and SYN-117, a dopamine beta-hydroxylase inhibitor for drug dependency.

Massey expects the compounds to enter separate Phase IIa trials, each in less than 50 patients, in 12 months.

The deal also gives the company SYN-119, an oral small molecule allosteric modulator of glutamate at the metabotropic glutamate receptor subtype 1 (mGluR1), which is in preclinical development for drug dependency. Massey expects the compound to enter Phase I testing in 12-14 months.

ROG has an option to take back exclusive rights to two undisclosed compounds at the completion of Phase IIa testing. Financial details were not disclosed.

For any compounds it licenses, Synosis plans to run small proof-of-concept clinical trials using clinical endpoints, biomarkers from the clinical literature, and imaging tools, including PET and functional MRI, to get an early indication of whether the compound is getting to the correct regions of the brain and at what concentration. Massey believes this approach will maximize the effect on the CNS while minimizing the effect on the periphery and said this will help the company to determine the appropriate dose going forward.

The company, which said it will look for partners for larger Phase III studies, expects its cash to last two to three years and allow it to go through five to six proof-of-concept programs.

Andy Heller