

Hope for new Alzheimer's drug from Saxony-Anhalt

Probiodrug is pushing ahead with the development of its business in the United States

The biopharmaceutical company Probiodrug from Halle/Saale, Saxony-Anhalt, is researching new approaches into fighting Alzheimer's disease. Probiodrug has been listed on the Euronext stock exchange in Amsterdam since 2014. The company has successfully developed a new therapy concept for diabetics in the past.

Since 2007, no new drug has been approved for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. The medical products currently available only treat the symptoms. "They improve the transmission of signals between the synapses. They don't prevent the neuronal decline, however," explains Konrad Glund. Glund is the co-founder and CEO of the biotechnology company Probiodrug which is based in Halle/Saale in the German federal state of Saxony-Anhalt, a location that the entrepreneur believes to provide excellent conditions for research and development. "The research conditions are very good and they have improved further in recent years. Saxony-Anhalt offers interesting financial instruments and provides start-up financing and investor mediation. It also provides direct project funding."

For more than twelve years, the company has been conducting research into a concept of therapy for treating Alzheimer's disease. The researchers from Saxony-Anhalt have discovered a mechanism through which a normal brain peptide, called amyloid-beta, is chemically changed and therefore advances the disease. An active ingredient developed by the company, encoded with PQ912, prevents this modification with the goal of delaying or stopping the progression of the disease. The extensive animal studies to have been completed so far have provided impressive confirmation of this. This could amount to a breakthrough in the development of a drug to fight against the disease. At present, 46 million people are living with Alzheimer's disease worldwide, a figure that is expected to increase to 132 million by 2050. According to the World Alzheimer Report 2015, the global costs to society are estimated to total more than 818 billion US dollars.

Since March of last year, the test substance PQ912 has been in clinical test phase IIa, on patients in the very early stages of Alzheimer's disease. The clinical trials are currently ongoing at 18 centres in seven European countries; the results should be available in early 2017. Additional detailed clinical trials are necessary in order to demonstrate efficacy and safety before PQ912 can be submitted for an approval procedure.

Probiodrug is also researching an antibody that binds and breaks down the amyloid beta that is changed by the active ingredient on a highly specific basis. These antibodies are currently undergoing preclinical testing.

The company was launched in 1997 as a spin-out of the Hans Knöll Institute for Natural Product Research Jena and the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. The co-founder and long standing director of research Hans-Ulrich Demuth discovered and patented a new principle for diabetes treatment, DP-4 inhibition. This principle led to the development of a new class of anti-diabetic drugs, gliptins. It currently generates billions in sales every year worldwide. Probiodrug has issued licenses to pharmaceuticals companies. In 2004, the entire business division for Diabetes was then sold to an American company.

Probiodrug then focused on the development of treatments for Alzheimer's disease. The research and development work is being managed by Inge Lues and represented on the executive board; Hendrik Liebers is CFO. Mark Booth was recently appointed to the position of business development director with his primary focus being the USA, where the company from Saxony-Anhalt wants to expand its business activities in the future. Probiodrug's attendance at the BIO International Convention 2016 conference in San Francisco, where the company will present itself along with other innovative biotech companies from Saxony-Anhalt from 6th until 9th June, is another important step along this path.

Probiodrug has been listed on the Euronext in Amsterdam since 2014. Up until then, 80 million Euros had already been invested in the company and its programme, with a further 36 million from leading investment funds having been added subsequently. The money is being invested in the current development projects. Konrad Glund explains how everyone is aware that the development of new pharmaceuticals products involves very high risks. "That's the price of genuine innovations. Probiodrug has characterised the approach for the new therapy in great detail, and with the data that has been generated by us, and increasingly by other pharmaceuticals companies, we are looking to the future with confidence."

Konrad Glund also tells us that Saxony-Anhalt offers excellent conditions for research and development: "The research conditions are very good and they have improved further in recent years. Saxony-Anhalt offers interesting financial instruments and provides start-up financing and investor mediation. Direct project funding is also available for research and development."

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