

The launch of a long-acting anticholinergic drug is expected to cement Boehringer Ingelheim's (Ingelheim, Germany) control of the COPD treatment market. Spirivia (tiotropium bromide) has been formulated as a once-daily formulation and is expected to greatly increase patient compliance. Meanwhile, the PDE₄ inhibitors Ariflo (cilomilast; GlaxoSmithKline) and roflumilast (Byk Gulden, Konstanz, Germany) are expected to reach the market in 2005.

Biotech bounces back at end of 2001

Biotechnology shares performed well throughout November 2001 in all sectors, claim Burrill and Company (San Francisco, CA, USA). The Burrill Biotech Select Index was up by 12% (down 19% YTD) and the NASDAQ was up by nearly 14% at month's end (down 22% YTD), both outperforming the DOW, which rose 9% (down 9% YTD). This was despite nationwide downsizing, revenue and earnings shortfalls, and budget deficits in the USA.

'Even though we are in recession... 'healthcare' continues to perform well,' said G. Steven Burrill, CEO of Burrill & Company. 'Venture capitalists and other financial institutions are not paid to sit on their cash... so investment is returning to the sector,' he said.

Nexell Therapeutics saw their shares rise by more than 200% on the news that they had received orphan drug status for their experimental treatment for chronic granulomatous disease. Burrill commented that 'This therapy is based on stem cell technology. The agency's decision underscores the importance of sustaining strong R&D in the stem cell arena.'

Other stem cell company stocks were temporarily buoyed by the announcement of the successful cloning of a human embryo by researchers at Advanced Cell Technologies and led to the increase of shares in Geron (by 8%), StemCells (by 9%) and Aastrom (by 9%). However, by the end of the month, these shares had moved to -13%, +4% and +5%, respectively.

Two recent medical technology IPOs saw their company's stock rise in

November. Given Imaging's (Yocneam, Israel) stock increased from US\$12 to US\$14.56 at the end of November, while Therasense (Alameda, CA, USA) went up from US\$19 to US\$23.20.

Meanwhile, the new biodefense industry did not perform as well with the stocks falling to readdress gains made in the previous month. After increasing 178% in October, Cepheid (Sunnyvale, California) stocks dropped 36% to US\$4.10. Similarly, shares in Nanogen (San Diego, CA, USA) fell 30% to US\$6.32. Despite the turbulence, this new industry was not a 'flash in the pan' said Burrill. 'A number of companies are swiftly adapting their platform and human therapeutics technologies to address the urgent and growing needs of our battle against terrorism.'

News in Brief was written by
*Joanne Clough, Joanna Milburn,
Joanna Owens and Ben Ramster*

People

Appointments

Completion of appointments program at Elan

Elan Corporation (Dublin, Ireland) has announced the appointment of Alison Pilgrim to the position of Senior Vice-President, Clinical Development, Biopharmaceuticals and Michael George as President, North America. Pilgrim was most recently Head of Clinical Development for DuPont Pharmaceuticals. She has also previously held senior clinical positions at Glaxo and Sanofi, where she was responsible for the development of the blockbuster products Sumatriptan (for Glaxo) and Plavix (for Sanofi).

Meanwhile, George comes from being CEO of UroCor for two years, during which time the company's revenue increased by 50% and its market

capitalization quadrupled, after which he presided over the company's acquisition of Dianon Systems. Previously, George held several positions at DuPont Pharmaceuticals including Director of Worldwide Marketing, President of European Operations, and President, North America, and has also held several senior marketing and management positions with Sandoz Pharmaceuticals and Bristol-Myers Squibb.

Donal J. Geaney, Chairman and CEO of Elan commented that: 'The addition of Alison Pilgrim and Mike George marks the completion of an important ongoing process... In the past year, other key external recruitments of senior executives included Daniel Welch, President, Worldwide Pharmaceuticals; Lars Ekman, President, Biopharmaceuticals R&D; Timothy Wright, President, Europe/ROW; and David Silver, Senior Vice-President, Global Pharma Strategy.'

New VP Business Development at Transgene

Michel Hubert has been appointed as Vice-President, Business Development at Transgene (Strasbourg, France) and moves from Laboratoires Fournier (Paris, France) where he was Executive Director, Business Development & Licensing. In this role, he created and managed the Business Development and Licensing Department, negotiating licensing agreements, co-marketing agreements for pharmaceutical products, joint venture agreements, and R&D agreements, and completed acquisitions of products and companies.

He was previously Business Development Manager for Rhone-Poulenc Sante (now Aventis). Giles Belanger, CEO of Transgene, commented that: 'Transgene will benefit greatly from Michel Hubert's experience and knowledge as we accelerate our development efforts in an environment characterized by more complex relationships between pharmaceutical companies and biotechnology companies

such as Transgene, as well as among biotechnology firms.'

Paul Moser joins Genset to head up CNS research

Paul C. Moser is to join Genset S.A. as Vice-President of Central Nervous System Development where he will lead the CNS research programs at the company's research centre in Evry (France). He has previously spent six years with Sanofi-Synthelabo Recherche as group leader in psychopharmacology where he led research programs looking for cognition enhancing agents, antipsychotic drugs, neuroprotective agents and analgesics, as well as identifying novel drug targets for schizophrenia and other cognitive disorders.

Moser was also previously a senior research scientist at the Marion Merrell Dow Research Institute. Andrew Pernet, President and CEO of Genset commented that this appointment now completes the company's scientific team.

Two key appointments at Xenon Genetics

Xenon Genetics (Vancouver, BC, Canada) have recently announced two senior management appointments: Celia M. Courchene will become Vice-President, Business Development and Simon Pimstone will become Chief Operating Officer.

Courchene was previously Vice-President, Business Development and Legal Affairs at QLT, before which she was head of business development activities for NeXstar Pharmaceuticals before it was acquired by Gilead Sciences.

Pimstone was a scientific founder of Xenon Genetics and has previously held the position of Vice-President, Clinical and Medical Affairs at the company. His new role in the company will also involve an active role in strategic planning and corporate development. Prior to working at the company, Pimstone was Clinical Director of the Lipid Clinic Outreach Program of British Columbia and an investigator in the Clinical Trials Unit of the St Paul's Hospital Lipid Clinic in the Province. Frank Holler, CEO of Xenon Genetics said: 'This is a newly created position at Xenon... Simon has demonstrated strong capabilities in managing the direction and growth of our

research operations and this promotion to Chief Operating Officer recognizes his track record of success with the Company.'

Meanwhile, of Courchene's appointment, he commented that she 'brings substantial business development experience gained with two publicly traded biotechnology companies. In these positions, she played a leadership role in all aspects of corporate development and successfully completed a number of in-licensing, out-licensing and collaboration agreements with senior pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies.'

Appointments was written by
Rebecca N. Lawrence

Obituary

In memoriam: Jeffery Isner 1947-2001

by James Symes

In the early morning hours of 31 October 2001, the world of medical science, and the cardiovascular community in particular, suffered a great loss. Jeff Isner died suddenly, at age 53, of a cardiac arrest, seemingly at the pinnacle of his outstanding career as a clinical cardiologist and scientist.

During the past decade, his cardiovascular research laboratory at St Elizabeth's Medical Center in Boston (MA, USA) has produced numerous original studies that dramatically advanced the concept of therapeutic angiogenesis for the treatment of ischemic heart and peripheral vascular disease. As Chief of Vascular Medicine and Director of the Human Gene Therapy Laboratory, he almost single-handedly brought this work from the bench to the bedside.

In December 1994, he and his team performed the first human cardiovascular gene transfer in a patient with end-stage peripheral vascular disease. Extending this concept to the heart, in February 1998, his group were the first to inject DNA encoding vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), via thoracotomy, into the heart of a patient with inoperable coronary

disease. Recently, they reported preliminary evidence of benefit in a randomized, double-blind study of VEGF gene-transfer using a percutaneous catheter. Takayuki Asahara, working in Jeff's laboratory, was the first to describe how bone marrow-derived endothelial progenitor cells enter the circulation following VEGF administration and participated in the process of revascularization of ischemic tissue, opening up an entirely new avenue of potential treatment for ischemic hearts and limbs.

The past year-and-a-half of Jeff's career was incredibly trying. He was devastated on behalf of his patients when his clinical gene transfer work was put on hold by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and when he was publicly attacked by the media. Nonetheless, he persevered when most would have acquiesced and, ironically just a few weeks before his death, he regained complete clearance from the FDA to resume his gene therapy program and was the recipient of a multimillion-dollar five-year program grant from the NIH for a Center of Excellence in Gene Therapy.

Jeff was, above all, a caring colleague, a devoted husband and father and, I am proud to say, a close personal friend. All of us at St Elizabeth's will miss him terribly as a man of great charisma, charm and humor who, despite his incredibly busy schedule, always made time to involve himself personally in the lives of his colleagues, patients and trainees. Lavish in his praise of others' accomplishments, he was ever humble in regard to his own. Truly among an elite group of international leaders in cardiovascular science, Jeff's greatest joy was to take pride in the work of his 24 post-doctoral research fellows and the accomplishments of his three children.

As those of us closest to him attempt to recover from the shock of his untimely death, we take solace from knowing that the work to which he devoted his professional life will go on, and that his legacy will be to have left a clearly marked trail for us to follow.

James F. Symes
*Chief, Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery
St Elizabeth's Medical Center of Boston
736 Cambridge Street
Boston
MA 02135-2997, USA*