

Press Releases



NEW RELEASE

MERLION PHARMA AND ICES INK R&D PARTNERSHIP TO BOOST SINGAPORE'S BIO-TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY

Singapore, 31 May 2006 – The Institute of Chemical and Engineering Sciences (ICES), a research institute under the Agency for Science, Technology and Research, signed a research collaboration agreement with MerLion Pharmaceuticals Pte Ltd to synthesise and develop novel molecules, based upon naturally derived compounds, for anti-tumour drug therapies. The agreement was signed by Dr Tony Buss, President and CEO of MerLion and Dr Keith Carpenter, Executive Director of ICES.

Under the terms of the agreement, ICES will design and synthesise compounds based on natural product leads for possible use as anti-tumour agents in humans. New compounds generated in ICES can be further modified and optimised in MerLion, which has significant medicinal chemistry expertise in the optimisation of the pharmacological, toxicological or metabolic properties of natural products.

The World Health Organisation estimates that there are approximately 11 million new incidences of cancer around the world every year, therefore research into new forms of cancer treatment constitutes a critical medical need.

The principle discovery methodology of many modern drugs focuses on the drug's interaction with specific proteins in the body. Many cancer inducing pathways consist of a series of interactions between such complex molecules. Naturally occurring compounds, which are produced by organisms such as microbes (bacteria, or fungi) or plants, have an ability to specifically interfere with such highly complex interactions. This makes them therefore an ideal starting point for the design of new pharmaceutical substances. There is a recognition across the industry that natural products represent a crucial strategy for the modulation of such protein: protein interactions.

MerLion Pharmaceuticals is a Singapore-based, privately held company, engaged in natural product based drug discovery that focuses on discrete R & D collaborations with research organisations possessing novel, validated targets in key therapeutic areas. Formed in 2002, the company works in partnership with an impressive number of large pharmaceutical and biotech companies worldwide.

Dr Tony Buss, President and CEO of MerLion commented, “We recognise the expertise and skills that ICES continues to develop within Singapore. The institute works with academic and industry leaders from across the world and has excellent chemistry capabilities. It is a significant benefit that ICES is able to link its synthetic chemistry skills with MerLion's natural product chemistry knowledge and biological understanding. I am sure that collaborations such as this can play important role in the biotech success of Singapore”.

Dr Keith Carpenter commented that, “We are excited to work with MerLion on this project which is both rewarding and meaningful for both parties. By sharing our facilities and research expertise and by bringing their extensive natural product chemistry knowledge and biological understanding in this partnership, we are confident that it will contribute to the development of Singapore’s biotech industry.”

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About Institute of Chemical and Engineering Sciences (ICES)

Institute of Chemical and Engineering Sciences (ICES) is a member of the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR). Established in 2002, ICES’ mission is to develop scientific knowledge, R&D manpower and technological capabilities to support future and current needs of Singapore’s chemical, biomedical and process engineering industries. The research programme covers chemistry and chemical engineering science, combined with advanced analytical characterization and measurement to develop state of the art technology for the petrochemical, general chemical, fine chemical and pharmaceutical industries

For more information, please visit www.ices.a-star.edu.sg

About MerLion Pharmaceuticals Pte Ltd

MerLion Pharmaceuticals Pte Ltd is a privately-held Singapore based pharmaceutical company, focusing on the discovery and development of new drug candidates from natural sources. MerLion Pharma collaborates with leading pharmaceutical companies, biotechnology companies and research institutes to identify and develop new drug candidates for a wide range of molecular targets.

MerLion Pharma has a strong pipeline of pre-clinical candidates displaying novel chemistry and modes of action. It plans to accelerate development of these compounds towards the clinic whilst maintaining a productive discovery engine, supplying new leads and candidates via collaboration and independently.

MerLion Pharma is staffed 68 employees and occupies 28,000 square feet of laboratory and office space in the Singapore Science Park. Further information about MerLion Pharmaceuticals can be found at <http://www.merlionpharma.com>

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