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Torque announces new appointments

January 28, 2019 | News

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Torque, an immuno-oncology company developing first-in-class Deep-Primed T Cell Therapeutics to direct immune power deep within the tumor microenvironment has announced the appointment of John Cox as Executive Chairman of the company's Board of Directors and Lisa Butterfield, PhD, to the Scientific Advisory Board.

We are delighted to have these accomplished leaders join the Torque team as we launch the first clinical trials of Deep-Primed T cell therapies," said Bart Henderson, Chief Executive Officer of Torque. "John has broad and diverse experience in business development, R&D, commercialization, and operations. After leading the spin-out of Bioverativ from Biogen, he grew and led that company through its acquisition by Sanofi in 2018, widely considered one of the most successful spin-outs in biopharma history. Additionally, his expertise and extensive knowledge of the gene therapy space and biopharmaceutical manufacturing will be particularly important as we work to deliver transformative immune cell therapies to patients. Lisa is a leading immunologist and immunotherapy investigator whose unique expertise in immune cell function and extensive experience designing immunologic monitoring and biomarkers for immunotherapy clinical trials will be enormous help to Torque as we initiate several pioneering clinical trials for Deep Primed cellular immunotherapies over the next 12 months."

Mr. Cox most recently was CEO of Bioverativ, leading its spin-out from Biogen in 2016 through its acquisition by Sanofi in 2018. Previously, he held several senior executive positions at Biogen from 2003 to 2016, most recently serving as Executive Vice President of Pharmaceutical Operations and Technology, with responsibility for overseeing Biogen's global manufacturing facilities, supply chain operations, technical development, quality and engineering, and development and commercialization of Biogen's biosimilars business. From October 2015 to May 2016, Mr. Cox also served as interim Executive Vice President, Global Therapeutic Operations, responsible for Biogen's therapeutic groups of Specialty Medicines and Rare Diseases, which included responsibility for the global commercial performance of Biogen's marketed products. His additional positions with Biogen included Senior Vice President of Technical Operations, Senior Vice President of Global Manufacturing, and Vice President of Manufacturing and General Manager of Biogen's operations in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Mr. Cox received a BS in Cell Biology from California State University and an MBA in Finance from the University of Michigan.

"Torque has a unique approach that has the potential to evolve cellular therapy for cancer from its current niche to become standard therapy," said Mr. Cox. "The company's Deep-Primed cell therapies have the potential to expand cell therapy to many solid tumors, administered as outpatient therapy with a high margin of safety. Torque has made impressive progress, with a robust pipeline of immune cell therapeutic candidates, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to apply my experience working with the Torque leadership team as the company advances its first Deep-Primed T cell therapeutics into clinical trials."

Dr. Butterfield is Vice President of the Parker Institute for Cancer Immunotherapy (PICI) Research Center and an Adjunct Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of California, San Francisco. She is focused on research and development of cancer vaccines and cellular therapies—specifically, immunotherapy for hepatocellular cancer and melanoma involving peptides, dendritic cells, and adenoviruses as well as effector responses to tumor antigens—and the development of the PICI laboratory facilities. Previously, from 2003 to 2018, Dr. Butterfield was Professor of Medicine, Surgery, Immunology, and Clinical and Translational Science at the University of Pittsburgh and Director of the Hillman Cancer Center Immunologic Monitoring and Cellular Products Laboratory. She is the current Immediate-Past President of the Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer (SITC) and a member of the SITC Executive Committee, and she led the Immunology Reference Lab for the ECOG-ACRIN NCI cooperative group from 2006 to 2018. She has published more than 150 peer-reviewed manuscripts, reviews, and book chapters and mentored more than 20 students and postdoctoral students. Dr. Butterfield earned a PhD in Biology from UCLA, followed by postdoctoral fellowships in Cellular Immunology and Cancer Gene Therapy, also at UCLA.

"Torque's cellular technology is a compelling new immunotherapy approach for treating both hematologic cancers and solid tumors, and I'm excited to help guide the team in its pioneering upcoming clinical trials," said Dr. Butterfield. "The combination of priming T cells' natural receptors to target multiple tumor antigens and anchoring proven immunomodulators to the cell surface has great potential for overcoming key challenges limiting cellular immunotherapy, including targeting heterogenous tumors and overcoming immunosuppression of T cells in the tumor microenvironment."

Deep-Primed T cells both target multiple tumor antigens and pharmacologically activate an immune response with anchored cytokines. This process does not require genetic engineering of the T cells and so preserves the natural T cell receptor for delivering a regulated immune response, with the potential for a high margin of safety. In addition to antigen priming, immunomodulators are tethered to the surface of Deep-Primed T cells—initially IL-15 and IL-12 cytokines, and TLR agonists—that activate both innate and adaptive immunity. Administering these immunomodulators systemically to a patient can cause lethal toxicity by activating immune cells throughout the body. By loading precise doses of cytokines onto the surface of T cells, Deep Priming focuses the immune response to target the tumor, without systemic exposure.

In hematologic cancers, this new class of immune cell therapeutics has the potential to improve on the initial success of single-target CAR T therapeutics with expanded efficacy and also move cell therapy treatment out of the hospital with a high margin of safety. For solid tumors, Deep-Primed T cells have the potential to enable efficacy against tumors with heterogeneous antigens protected by hostile microenvironments, which are not readily addressable with the first generation of immune cell therapies.

Torque is an immuno-oncology Cambridge-based company developing Deep Primed™ T cell therapeutics to direct immune power deep within the tumor microenvironment. Torque's lead product candidate—TRQ1501 (Deep IL-15 primed T cells)—will initiate Phase 1/2 clinical trials for hematologic and solid tumors in early 2019.