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ASIA EDITION

Korea's Wellmarker Bio inks cancer drug trial collaboration with Merck

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To evaluate a first-in-class treatment with a novel mechanism in combination with KEYTRUDA (pembrolizumab), MSD's anti-PD-1 therapy

South Korean firm Wellmarker Bio (WMBIO) has entered a clinical trial collaboration and supply agreement with Merck (known as MSD outside US and Canada).

Under the agreement, WMBIO will sponsor the Phase 1 (or Phase 1b) clinical trial for WM-A1-3389, a novel therapeutic antibody for Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer (NSCLC) patients with low or no PD-L1 expression, in combination with KEYTRUDA (pembrolizumab), MSD's anti-PD-1 therapy. Some NSCLC patients with low or no PD-L1 expression have shown limited response to treatment with immunotherapies alone and there is a high unmet need in these patient populations. WMBIO is also planning to expand the target patient group to other solid tumour indications.

WM-A1-3389 is a novel therapeutic antibody targeting a new immune checkpoint protein discovered by Wellmarker Bio and has demonstrated efficacy across different PBMC humanised models. An additive benefit of WM-A1-3389 and anti-PD-1 antibody was evidenced in preclinical mouse models including PD-1-resistant CT26 and LLC-1 mouse models.

WM-A1-3389 development was funded by Korea Drug Development Fund (KDDF). In eary 2022, this study was selected by the follow-up project of KDDF, in the preclinical stage. In addition, Wellmarker Bio is co-developing liquid biopsy companion diagnostics (CDx) with Cytogen.