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Merck buys investigational B-cell depletion therapy from Chinese startup Curon Biopharma for $700 M

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For potential applications in B-cell malignancies and autoimmune diseases



Merck, known as MSD outside of the United States and Canada, and Curon Biopharmaceutical, a China-based biotechnology startup, has announced that the companies have entered into a definitive agreement under which Merck, through a subsidiary, has agreed to acquire CN201, a novel investigational clinical-stage bispecific antibody for the treatment of B-cell associated diseases.

“We continue to identify opportunities to expand and diversify our pipeline,” said Dr Dean Y. Li, president, Merck Research Laboratories. “Early clinical data have provided robust evidence for the potential of CN201 to target and deplete circulating and tissue B cells with the potential to treat a range of malignant and autoimmune diseases.”

Under the terms of the agreement, Merck through a subsidiary will acquire full global rights to CN201 for an upfront payment of $700 million in cash. Curon is also eligible to receive up to $600 million in milestone payments associated with the development and regulatory approval of CN201.

CN201 is currently being evaluated in Phase 1 and Phase 1b/2 clinical trials for the treatment of patients with relapsed or refractory non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma (NHL) and relapsed or refractory B-cell acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL), respectively. Preliminary data suggest CN201 has activity in patients with relapsed or refractory B-cell hematologic malignancies and is well tolerated, with the potential to induce significant and sustained reductions in B-cell populations.

Merck plans to evaluate CN201 as a treatment for B-cell malignancies as well as investigate its potential to provide a novel, scalable option for the treatment of autoimmune diseases.