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Merck gets cancer drug license from Symphogen

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Symphogen grants phase II license of oncology drug to Merck

Singapore: Symphogen signed an exclusive worldwide license agreement with Merck in Germany for Sym004, an investigational antibody mixture targeting the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR).

Sym004 is currently being evaluated in a phase I/II trial for the treatment of patients with advanced KRAS wild-type metastatic colorectal cancer (mCRC), who have previously progressed on treatment with standard chemotherapy and a marketed anti-EGFR monoclonal antibody. In addition, a single-arm, open-label phase II trial in patients with squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck (SCCHN), who have failed anti-EGFR-based therapy, is currently ongoing.trial

Under the agreement, Symphogen will receive from Merck an upfront payment of â‚¬20 million. Symphogen is also eligible to receive up to â‚¬225 million for clinical development and regulatory milestones, â‚¬250 million in potential combined sales performance milestones and royalties on net worldwide sales. In exchange, Merck will gain exclusive worldwide rights to develop and commercialize Sym004. As of July 2012, 88 patients have been treated with Sym004 in clinical trials.

"We believe that Merck is uniquely well positioned to develop Sym004 based on its deep knowledge of the EGFR area," said Mr Kirsten Drejer, CEO, Symphogen. "This transaction further validates the antibody mixture approach as a highly attractive option."

"Sym004 further strengthens our early development pipeline by adding a product that is thought to act via a proposed synergistic mechanism of action not previously studied, but more specifically, it has the potential to become a key asset complementing our already highly successful Erbitux franchise," commented Dr Susan Jane Herbert, head, global business development and strategy, Merck Serono.