AC Immune Wins Prestigious Award to Develop a “Game-Changing” Parkinson’s Diagnostic Tool

July 30, 2020

AC Immune is one of three winners sharing USD 10 million through The Michael J. Fox Foundation Ken Griffin Alpha-synuclein Imaging Competition

The award follows compelling preclinical results presented at AAIC on the Company’s alpha-synuclein positron emission tomography -(PET) tracer program

Further validates the ability of AC Immune’s proprietary platforms to accelerate delivery of a new class of promising diagnostics in neurodegenerative diseases

LAUSANNE, Switzerland, July 30, 2020 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- AC Immune SA (NASDAQ: ACIU), a Swiss-based, clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company with a broad pipeline focused on neurodegenerative diseases, today announced it is one of the winners of the Ken Griffin Alpha-synuclein Imaging Competition from The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s Research (MJFF), and is eligible to receive together with its partner USD 3.2 million (CHF 3.1 million).

The funding will support the nonclinical and clinical investigation of AC Immune’s proprietary alpha-synuclein-PET tracers, which are the most advanced in the field and could deliver the world’s first imaging agent capable of accurately detecting and monitoring progression of Parkinson’s disease (PD). The clinical arm of the AC Immune project will be conducted in partnership with Prof. Oskar Hansson’s team of world-class researchers at Lund University and Skåne University Hospital in Sweden, which is a recognized Center of Excellence in the field of diagnostics for neurodegenerative diseases. Skåne University Hospital is eligible to receive USD 0.7 million over two years to support this arm of the project.

Prof. Andrea Pfeifer, CEO of AC Immune SA, commented: “AC Immune is very proud to have attracted repeated support from MJFF over the last five years to advance development of alpha-synuclein-PET tracers. This award follows compelling preclinical results presented this week at the Alzheimer’s Association International Conference (AAIC) on our next generation PET tracer which demonstrates enhanced contrast and alpha-synuclein target specificity, putting our tracer in a strong position to become a first-in-class precision diagnostic tool for Parkinson’s disease (PD). This is a particularly important area of research, and this award really demonstrates the power of our innovative Morphomer™ discovery platform to accelerate the design, development and synthesis of conformation-specific small molecules. An effective alpha-synuclein PET tracer would enable and accelerate the development of new PD therapies as a powerful tool for measuring the effect of novel drugs on alpha-synuclein pathology in the brain.”

Jamie Eberling, Ph.D, Vice President of Research at MJFF, said: “The Foundation is committed to the development of an imaging tracer for Parkinson’s. AC Immune has already advanced alpha-synuclein tracers to human clinical testing, and we look forward to its progress as it continues clinical testing and develops new tracers.”

The MJFF award for AC Immune’s alpha-synuclein-PET program follows the announcement at this year’s AAT-AD/PD™ conference that the Company’s SupraAntigen™-derived anti-alpha-synuclein therapeutic antibody candidate has advanced into preclinical development to treat PD and other synucleinopathies. The combined potential of AC Immune’s therapeutic and diagnostic programs is based on the Company's capabilities in precision medicine and may improve the diagnosis and treatment of alpha-synuclein pathologies, which are also of increasing interest in Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and NeuroOrphan indications.

Prof. Oskar Hansson, of Lund University and Skåne University Hospital said: “It would be a huge step forward if we succeed in the development of an accurate and reliable PET method for detection of alpha-synuclein pathology. Such a diagnostic method would be vital for increasing our understanding of the diseases, and more importantly it would facilitate the development of new disease modifying therapies that might halt, or even stop, the progression of PD.”

Prof. Pfeifer continued: “Our second generation alpha-synuclein-PET tracer started a first-in-human study last year and plans are in place to start another study to evaluate this tracer in genetic populations and, in parallel, advance a third generation candidate to clinical stage. With this latest award from MJFF, we look forward to advancing this important diagnostic program in collaboration with Prof. Hansson at Lund University and Skåne University Hospital.”

About AC Immune’s alpha-synuclein programs
Alpha-synuclein misfolding, aggregation and seeding are the molecular basis for the formation of Lewy bodies, a hallmark of PD, multiple system atrophy, and Lewy Body Dementia. Antibody-mediated clearance of pathological alpha-synuclein, including Lewy bodies, represents an attractive strategy for therapeutic intervention. Availability of non-invasive diagnostic tools like PET imaging agents would allow accurate diagnosis and monitoring of disease progression and would potentially enable longitudinal drug efficacy measurements in patients.

AC Immune’s PET tracers are derived from the Company’s innovative Morphomer™ discovery platform, which accelerates the design, development and synthesis of conformation-specific small molecules to power successful diagnostic and therapeutic approaches. The Morphomer™ platform has produced multiple small molecules with clinical proof-of-concept that bind selectively to pathological forms of human proteins such as alpha-synuclein and Tau. It is complemented by AC Immune’s SupraAntigen™ platform, which has generated clinically validated monoclonal antibodies and vaccines directed against pathological forms of Tau and Abeta. Together, these platforms have attracted partnerships with leading, global pharmaceutical companies, including Genentech, a member of the Roche group, Janssen Pharmaceuticals and Eli Lilly and Company, and have established AC Immune as an industry leader in the development of novel diagnostic and therapeutic agents for neurodegenerative diseases.

About the Michael J. Fox Foundation Ken Griffin Alpha-synuclein Imaging Competition
MJFF is the world's largest nonprofit funder of Parkinson's research with pioneering collaborations across industry, academia and government. This

new award from the Ken Griffin Alpha-synuclein Imaging Competition is largely funded through a USD 7.5 million leadership gift from Ken Griffin, Founder and CEO of the Chicago-based global investment firm, Citadel, to incentivize research teams to race to develop a game-changing Parkinson's diagnostic tool. The USD 10 million Ken Griffin Alpha-synuclein Imaging Competition will be shared between three winning proposals in two rounds of funding with USD 8.5 million initially shared over two years. The final USD 1.5 million will then be awarded to the team that has progressed furthest to develop its program.

About AC Immune SA

AC Immune SA is a Nasdaq-listed clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company, which aims to become a global leader in precision medicine for neurodegenerative diseases. The Company utilizes two proprietary platforms, SupraAntigen™ and Morphomer™, to design, discover and develop small molecule and biological therapeutics as well as diagnostic products intended to diagnose, prevent and modify neurodegenerative diseases caused by misfolding proteins. The Company's pipeline features nine therapeutic and three diagnostic product candidates, with six currently in clinical trials. It has collaborations with major pharmaceutical companies including Genentech, a member of the Roche group, Eli Lilly and Company and Janssen Pharmaceuticals.

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Forward looking statements

This press release contains statements that constitute "forward-looking statements" within the meaning of Section 27A of the Securities Act of 1933 and Section 21E of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934. Forward-looking statements are statements other than historical fact and may include statements that address future operating, financial or business performance or AC Immune's strategies or expectations. In some cases, you can identify these statements by forward-looking words such as "may," "might," "will," "should," "expects," "plans," "anticipates," "believes," "estimates," "predicts," "projects," "potential," "outlook" or "continue," and other comparable terminology. Forward-looking statements are based on management's current expectations and beliefs and involve significant risks and uncertainties that could cause actual results, developments and business decisions to differ materially from those contemplated by these statements. These risks and uncertainties include those described under the captions "Item 3. Key Information – Risk Factors" and "Item 5. Operating and Financial Review and Prospects" in AC Immune's Annual Report on Form 20-F and other filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission. These include: the impact of Covid-19 on our business, suppliers, patients and employees and any other impact of Covid-19. Forward-looking statements speak only as of the date they are made, and AC Immune does not undertake any obligation to update them in light of new information, future developments or otherwise, except as may be required under applicable law. All forward-looking statements are qualified in their entirety by this cautionary statement.

Source: AC Immune SA