



Contact: Rick Sacks
973.467.8728
rick@smartpr.net

UT-Battelle Licenses Tissue-regeneration Technologies to NellOne Therapeutics; Advances ORNL Spin-out on Commercialization Path

OAK RIDGE, Tenn., Jan. 27, 2010 – In a major step toward commercialization of a promising [therapeutic treatment](#), Oak Ridge National Laboratory contractor UT-Battelle announced at a signing ceremony here today that it has exclusively licensed patents on inventions based on the Nell-1 gene to NellOne Therapeutics, Inc. (NellOne), a company spun out of research performed at the Department of Energy laboratory.

The protein therapy treatment under development takes advantage of the Nell-1 gene's cell-signaling pathway that controls tissue growth and maturation in mammalian organs.

The [foundation for this therapy](#) is research performed by [Dr. Cymbeline Culiat](#), who as an ORNL systems genetics researcher, identified the role that the Nell-1 pathway plays in tissue growth and maturation.

Dr. Culiat is currently leading the NellOne research effort to translate the Nell-1 pathway discoveries into a therapy that restores both mass and function to damaged human tissues, such as heart and skeletal muscle.

If successful, the protein therapy could improve the lives of victims of heart attacks and severe muscle wounds. Other therapies, such as stem-cell treatments, have succeeded in triggering tissue formation but fall short in restoring the actual function of the tissue.

[Battelle Ventures](#), with its Knoxville-based affiliate fund, Innovation Valley Partners (IVP), created NellOne with a \$1.5-million [seed investment](#) in 2008.

“Our executing this license is confirmation from NellOne that sufficient proof-of-principle experiments have been completed and that the company is progressing toward the commercialization of an extremely promising technology that could one day vastly improve the lives of countless heart patients,” said [Tracy Warren](#), NellOne chief executive officer and Battelle Ventures general partner.

“NellOne is a ‘virtual’ company, dedicated to the development of intellectual property and moving into a clinical setting,” Warren continued, noting that it currently operates out of the IVP office. “It is still a very-early-stage company and while its technology has some history, the application of that technology is still in its infancy.”

(more)

“This licensing agreement is a statement not only of NellOne’s promise, but also of how vital the support of venture capital investment is during these crucial early years of technology development and nurturing,” said ORNL Partnerships Director Tom Ballard. “This announcement is an important step along the way to the marketplace past the initial proof-of-concept stage.”

Said Dr. Culiati: “In the technology transfer process of the Nell-1 project, I learned very quickly that to transform my basic science discoveries into viable and useful technology would be difficult and complex, requiring much expertise, not only in science and technology, but also in such vital areas as business, law, clinical aspects and communications.

“We have succeeded so far because of a team of talented, committed and creative people.”

Battelle Ventures and IVP have a combined \$255 million—\$220 million and \$35 million, respectively—to create and accelerate early-stage technologies.

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