



January 16, 2013

Cancer Research UK and Cancer Research Technology Initiate AT13148 Clinical Trial to Treat Several Cancer Types

DUBLIN, Calif., Jan. 16, 2013 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Astex Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (Nasdaq:ASTX), a pharmaceutical company dedicated to the discovery and development of novel small molecule therapeutics, today announced that collaborators Cancer Research UK and its commercial arm Cancer Research Technology (CRT) are launching a trial of an experimental drug shown to simultaneously block many enzymes that control cancer cell growth and death. The 'master-switch' experimental drug, owned by Astex Pharmaceuticals, is being studied in a range of cancer types.

Cancer Research UK's Drug Development Office (DDO) will fund, manage and sponsor this early-stage Phase I clinical trial of up to 40 patients at The Institute of Cancer Research, London, and The Royal Marsden Hospital.

The drug, AT13148, is one of eight drugs to be developed through Cancer Research UK's Clinical Development Partnerships program, which is a joint initiative between the charity's DDO and CRT. The program develops promising cancer drugs that pharmaceutical companies do not have the resources to progress through early phase clinical trials to see if they can benefit cancer patients. Without this program many promising drugs would be left on the shelves gathering dust.

AT13148 is a multi-AGC kinase inhibitor that inhibits several enzymes in the PI3K - AKT tumor cell survival pathway including protein kinase B (PKB/AKT) and p70S6K. AT13148 shows a distinct mechanism of action from other AKT inhibitors. Pre-clinical research was published recently (Clin. Cancer Res.; 2012,18(14); 3912-3923).

The molecule was originally discovered by scientists on the PKB drug discovery program, a collaboration between Astex Pharmaceuticals, CRT and The Institute of Cancer Research, which ran from 2003 through 2006.

Harren Jhoti, PhD, Astex Pharmaceuticals president and director said, "We are very gratified with the progress that the collaboration has achieved and that this work has progressed into the clinic."

Astex Pharmaceuticals can decide to develop the drug further based on the Phase I/IIa clinical trial data. If it chooses not to, Cancer Research Technology has the rights to secure an alternative partner and ensure the drug has every possible chance of reaching patients.

Dr. Victoria John, head of clinical partnerships at Cancer Research UK's Drug Development Office said, "We're delighted to open the first clinical trial of this experimental drug to find out if it can benefit cancer patients in the future. This molecule was brought to us at a very early stage in its development and, with the preclinical work now completed, we're extremely pleased it's obtained regulatory approval to enter the clinic."

About Astex Pharmaceuticals

Astex Pharmaceuticals is dedicated to the discovery and development of novel small molecule therapeutics with a focus on oncology. The Company is developing a proprietary pipeline of novel therapies and is creating de-risked products for partnership with leading pharmaceutical companies. Astex Pharmaceuticals developed DACOGEN® (decitabine) for Injection and receives significant royalties on global sales.

For more information about Astex Pharmaceuticals, Inc., please visit <http://www.astx.com>.

The Astex Pharmaceuticals, Inc. logo is available at <http://www.globenewswire.com/newsroom/prs/?pkgid=12273>

About The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR)

The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) is one of the world's most influential cancer research institutes. Scientists and clinicians at the ICR are working every day to make a real impact on cancer patients' lives. Through its unique partnership with The Royal Marsden Hospital and 'bench-to-bedside' approach, the ICR is able to create and deliver results in a way that other institutions cannot. Together the two organizations are rated in the top four cancer centers globally.

The ICR has an outstanding record of achievement dating back more than 100 years. It provided the first convincing evidence that DNA damage is the basic cause of cancer, laying the foundation for the now universally accepted idea that cancer is a genetic disease. Today it leads the world at isolating cancer-related genes and discovering new targeted drugs for personalized cancer treatment.

As a college of the University of London, the ICR provides postgraduate higher education of international distinction. It has charitable status and relies on support from partner organizations, charities and the general public.

The ICR's mission is to make the discoveries that defeat cancer. For more information visit www.icr.ac.uk

About The Institute of Cancer Research's Cancer Research UK Cancer Therapeutics Unit

The Institute of Cancer Research's Cancer Research UK Cancer Therapeutics Unit is the world's leading academic drug discovery team. It has discovered 16 new drug candidates over the past six years, with six of these progressing to Phase I clinical trial and one drug — abiraterone — being licensed in the US, Canada and Europe for patients with advanced prostate cancer. This success was recently [recognized by the American Association of Cancer Research's Team Science Award](#).

About Cancer Research Technology

Cancer Research Technology (CRT) is a specialist commercialization and development company, which aims to develop new discoveries in cancer research for the benefit of cancer patients. CRT works closely with leading international cancer scientists and their institutes to protect intellectual property arising from their research and to establish links with commercial partners. CRT facilitates the discovery, development and marketing of new cancer therapeutics, vaccines, diagnostics and enabling technologies. CRT is a wholly owned subsidiary of Cancer Research UK, the largest independent funder of cancer research in the world. Further information about CRT can be found at www.cancertechnology.com

About Cancer Research UK's Drug Development Office

Cancer Research UK's Drug Development Office has an impressive record of developing novel treatments for cancer. It currently has a portfolio of around 35 new anti-cancer agents in preclinical development, phase I or early phase II clinical trials. Since 1982, the Cancer Research UK Drug Development Office has taken over 120 potential new anti-cancer agents into clinical trials in patients, six of which have subsequently made it to market and many others are still in clinical development. Marketed drugs include Temozolomide, a drug discovered by Cancer Research UK scientists, that is an effective new treatment for brain cancer and Abiraterone which was co-discovered by Cancer Research UK scientists to treat advanced prostate cancer. Six other drugs are in late development phase III trials. This rate of success is comparable to that of any pharmaceutical company.

About Cancer Research UK

- Cancer Research UK is the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research.
- The charity's groundbreaking work into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer has helped save millions of lives. This work is funded entirely by the public.
- Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates in the UK double in the last forty years.
- Cancer Research UK supports research into all aspects of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses.
- Together with its partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK's vision is to beat cancer.

For further information about Cancer Research UK's work or to find out how to support the charity, please call 020 3469 6699 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org

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