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Astex Pharmaceuticals, Cancer Research Technology and The Institute of Cancer Research Announce Epigenetic Drug Discovery Collaboration

DUBLIN, Calif., and CAMBRIDGE, UK, Sept. 6, 2012 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Astex Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (Nasdaq:ASTX), a pharmaceutical company dedicated to the discovery and development of novel small molecule therapeutics, Cancer Research Technology Limited (CRT) and The Institute of Cancer Research, London, have initiated a collaboration to discover and develop drug candidates targeting an undisclosed epigenetic target in a blood cancer with high unmet medical need. The collaboration combines Astex's world-renowned fragment-based drug discovery platform and epigenetic* drug development experience with the expertise in blood cancer biology at The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) and proven success in drug discovery at the Cancer Research UK Cancer Therapeutics Unit at the ICR.

Dysregulated epigenetic mechanisms are now understood to underlie a variety of cancer types, and have been successfully targeted by the first generation of epigenetic anticancer drugs**. In some cases, specific epigenetic mutational events can be linked to disease etiology, providing an opportunity to develop highly targeted personalized medicines and associated companion diagnostics that will ultimately improve survival and reduce side effects.

"We are delighted to be entering into this new collaboration with the ICR and CRT on a key epigenetics target," said Harren Jhoti, PhD, president of Astex Pharmaceuticals. "This new partnership builds on the highly successful collaboration which Astex entered into with the ICR and CRT in 2003 on another cancer target, PKB/Akt. That collaboration led to the discovery of two clinical candidates, the first of which, AZD5363, was taken into Phase I by our partner AstraZeneca in early 2011 and the second of which, AT13148, is being prepared to be taken into Phase 1 under our development partnership with Cancer Research UK. "

Professor Paul Workman, director of the Cancer Research UK Cancer Therapeutics Unit at The Institute of Cancer Research, said: "ICR scientists are pioneers at unraveling blood cancer drug targets, which others have considered challenging to drug effectively. We have a very strong track record of designing drugs to attack challenging biological targets and bringing them into clinical trial, and given Astex's complementary expertise, we are very excited about the potential of this collaboration."

Dr Phil L'Huillier, director of business management at CRT, said: "Putting in place this collaboration between the Cancer Research UK-funded drug discovery team at the ICR and Astex provides a powerful route to identify drug candidates for this promising new target.

"The deal will ensure that the research programme benefits from the necessary investment to progress the research to its full potential while building on the validation and assay development work that has been carried out at the ICR and funded by Cancer Research UK and others.

"We hope that this research will lead to the development of new drugs to ultimately improve survival for cancer patients."

Notes to editors:

*Epigenetics describes gene modifications such as methylation and histone modification that do not involve a change in the DNA sequence.

**including the marketed drug Dacogen® which was developed by Astex.

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

The Institute of Cancer Research is one of the world's most influential cancer research institutes. Scientists and clinicians at The Institute of Cancer Research (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 organisations are rated in the top four cancer centres 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 personalised cancer treatment. The Cancer Therapeutics Unit and Drug Development Unit at the ICR and The Royal Marsden were recently honoured with the 2012 American Association for Cancer Research Team Science Award for the "tremendous impact" of their preclinical and clinical studies.

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 organisations, 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 Cancer Research Technology

Cancer Research Technology Ltd (CRT) is a specialist commercialisation and development company, which aims to develop and commercialise 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 world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. Further information about CRT can be found at www.cancertechnology.com

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 0300 123 1861 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org.

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