

Anokion acquires its spin-out, raises \$40M series B

By Michael Fitzhugh, News Editor

Anokion SA, a Swiss biotech focused on autoimmune disease, is bringing in-house a startup it spun out for a development alliance with Astellas Pharma Inc. The acquisition of Kanyos Bio Inc., announced alongside news it closed a \$40 million series B financing, puts front and center KAN-101, a preclinical celiac disease drug poised for an IND filing by year-end. Together with Anokion's lead candidate, ANK-780, an antigen-specific treatment for multiple sclerosis (MS), the company anticipates having two programs in clinical development within the next 12 months.



John Hohneker,
president and CEO,
Anokion

Original Kanyos backers Versant Ventures, Novartis Venture Fund, Novo Ventures funded the series B alongside Swiss-based private investors, Anokion said. Celgene Corp., which has a collaboration with Anokion to develop immune-modulating programs for autoimmune diseases, also participated in the financing. To date, the company has secured more than \$160 million in equity and partner capital, it said.

Among the founding investors in Kanyos was Astellas, which initially provided the spin-out with \$16 million in equity

financing to back development of programs for up to three indications, including celiac disease and type 1 diabetes. Astellas framed Kanyos as a key part of its efforts to develop "safe and fundamental" treatments for autoimmune disease in its 2017 annual report. But, by early 2018, the partners made a mutual decision to exit the collaboration, Anokion's president and CEO, John Hohneker, told *BioWorld*.

Anokion's antigen-specific immune tolerance platform, initially developed at École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, at first focused on tethering an antigen of interest to red blood cells to prevent autoimmunity. It has since evolved to hit a yet-to-be-disclosed receptor that sets off a cascade of events believed to offer a similar benefit, Anokion Chief Operating Officer Deborah Geraghty told *BioWorld*.

While the company's first project in the near-term will be with KAN-101 in celiac disease, this week its team is preparing to present data at the 35th Congress of the European Committee



Deborah Geraghty,
chief operating officer,
Anokion

for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis on its work in that field. In an abstract for which Anokion co-founder and Chief Scientific Officer Stephan Kontos is the lead author, researchers said they have developed a preclinical-stage "therapeutic approach for MS that induces antigen-specific tolerance to CNS autoantigens and ameliorates neuroinflammation."

"In preclinical models we demonstrate how our liver-targeted antigens prime antigen-specific T cells towards

tolerogenic phenotypes, including expression of inhibitory and exhaustion markers, clonal T-cell deletion, and the induction of regulatory T-cell responses," the authors wrote.

In addition to work in mice, Kontos and his colleagues have demonstrated how the mechanisms they describe translate to a model of antigen-specific T-cell tolerance in a cynomolgus macaque, which they said supports the translational potential of the platform.

Though Anokion is working in a highly specialized field, autoimmunity and celiac disease in particular continue to be areas of high interest for numerous companies across the sector. The latest spike of interest arrived with GlaxoSmithKline plc's move to buy Sitari Pharmaceuticals Inc., a La Jolla, Calif.-based company incubated at COI Pharmaceuticals Inc. Sitari is focused on the development of TG2 inhibitors with the potential to suppress the autoimmune response that results in intestinal inflammation and cell pathogenesis in celiac patients.

Roche Holding AG's Genentech Inc. is also getting into the act, inking a partnership with Parvus Therapeutics Inc. in May for the development, manufacture and commercialization of therapies to treat inflammatory bowel, autoimmune liver and celiac diseases without immunosuppression.

Should all go well, Anokion, too, could see a future in which it tightens ties with its own industry heavyweight: Under the terms of its exclusive global research collaboration with Celgene Corp., the Summit, N.J.-based giant has the exclusive right to acquire it at prespecified option exercise points. ♦