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24 Apr 2017



A research team headed by Dr. Omar El-Agnaf, Acting Executive Director of Qatar Biomedical Research Institute (QBRI), which is one of Hamad Bin Khalifa University's (HBKU) three national research institutes, has been selected by the Austrian biotechnology company, AFFiRiS AG, to evaluate selected parameters in clinical trials on an innovative anti-alpha-synuclein immunotherapy-based approach to treating Parkinson's disease that has been developed by the company.

Research carried out by Dr. El-Agnaf's team of scientists that uses novel techniques to identify biomarkers of Parkinson's disease in human blood and cerebral spinal fluid samples attracted the attention of AFFiRiS AG, who are a leading name in the field of developing immunotherapies that target chronic diseases with unmet medical needs, and led them to call upon the Qatar-based team to use the tools and expertise developed at HBKU to validate the target engagement of alpha-synuclein for the company's first-of-its-kind Parkinson's disease immunotherapy approach. The product has been developed in Europe by a team of scientists and its pre-clinical and clinical development has been supported by Michael J. Fox Foundation.

Using the team's novel analysis techniques, the researchers at HBKU will assess the product's ability to engage with the target, alpha-synuclein. QBRI's scientists will explore novel biomarkers discovered by them that facilitate early diagnosis and treatment of Parkinson's disease and use the technique they have developed at HBKU to assess the magnitude of target engagement of this new immunotherapy-based compound.

Commenting on his team's involvement with AFFiRiS AG, Dr. El-Agnaf said: "Parkinson's disease remains a debilitating medical condition for which there is currently no cure. Treatments that help patients with Parkinson's typically work with those individuals who were diagnosed with the disease when it is still in early stages. Despite good symptomatic treatment options, there is a substantial need for disease modifying agents and alternatives to the existing treatment options. With so many people affected by Parkinson's disease around the world, QBRI is committed to collaborative research with dedicated partners from around the world, such as AFFiRiS AG and others working across Europe on contributing to better understanding of the mode of action, with a view to helping achieve the next landmark in Parkinson's disease cure.

"Rather than only offer symptomatic improvements to people living with Parkinson's disease, which is the case with the treatment strategies currently available, the collaboration with AFFiRiS AG may take us to the next level to get closer to a disease modifying approach. We are delighted to have the opportunity to play our part in ensuring that the AFFiRiS compound induced effects on alpha-synuclein undergo extensive and rigorous testing to foster next steps of product development.

Dr. El Agnaf's group, which is based within QBRI's labs within Education City in Doha, specializes in biomedical research that focuses on Parkinson's disease and related neurodegenerative disorders and they are also involved in the development of drugs that target the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases. Over recent years, the team has built a solid research portfolio, placing the institute's lab and its published research at the forefront of neuroscience research in the global medical sphere.

QBRI has established itself as a leading disease-focused research institute in the Middle East. Currently, QBRI operates three research centers that target different diseases: the Neurological Disorders Research Center, the Cancer Research Center, and the Diabetes Research Center. By being a part of the first clinical trial that focuses on the mode of action with the AFFiRiS compound for Parkinson's disease, HBKU's researchers are demonstrating how the university is committed to paving the way for new breakthroughs in medicine, addressing the key healthcare challenges faced today in Qatar and around the world.