

“Oligomerix Raises Series B Round to Mount New Attack on Alzheimer's”

By: Brian Gormley

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Oligomerix Inc. hopes to stem a recent flow of bad news from Alzheimer's disease drugmakers through a new approach that's gaining currency among pharmaceutical companies.

The New York company has just raised \$2.8 million in Series B financing, including newly issued convertible preferred shares and warrants, from Durand Venture Associates, Wheatley Partners and individuals. Durand and Wheatley led Oligomerix's Series A round last year.

Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia, affects 5.4 million Americans, and existing drugs don't stop its progression. Several promising treatments have faltered recently, including immunoglobulin, a Baxter International Inc. drug that missed the mark in Phase III clinical trials. Last year Eli Lilly & Co. got disappointing results from a Phase III study of the antibody solanezumab in mild-to-moderate patients, but continues to develop the drug for mild Alzheimer's disease.

Like several other medicines tested for Alzheimer's, solanezumab takes aim at the beta-amyloid plaque that forms in Alzheimer's patients. It enables amyloid-beta to be cleared away before it clumps to form these beta-amyloid plaques. Last year Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer Inc. discontinued the development of another antibody designed to clear away beta-amyloid, bapineuzumab, after seeing poor results in a clinical studies.

Drugmakers haven't given up on the amyloid-based strategy, but they are showing increased interest in another Alzheimer's target, the tau protein. Researchers have long known that in addition to accumulating beta-amyloid plaque, Alzheimer's patients also develop neurofibrillary tangles. These tangles are made up of tau protein.

Though researchers have recognized plaques and tangles as hallmarks of Alzheimer's, they historically viewed tau as more of a downstream player. But now, companies are rethinking that view and are starting to see the protein as an important target.

Last month, Eli Lilly acquired two investigational positron emission tomography, or PET, tracers used to image tau tangles. It will use the technology in its anti-amyloid and anti-tau drug-development, the company said. Last year, Genentech

stuck a deal with privately held AC Immune SA to research anti-tau antibody treatments for Alzheimer's disease.

These developments are no surprise to Oligomerix, which formed in 2006 and develops drugs targeting tau oligomers that are believed to impair learning and memory and to cause the spread of disease in the brain. By neutralizing extracellular tau, the company hopes to improve cognitive function and interrupt Alzheimer's disease progression.

"We think tau has a direct role, not a passive role," said Chief Executive James Moe. "There seems to be a lot momentum building for moving tau programs like ours from discovery into development."

Oligomerix seeks a corporate partner to help it advance its programs toward clinical trials. The new financing gives it about two years of funding, according to Dr. Moe. He declined to discuss the company's valuation.

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