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News Release

NIH Awards Fannin Phase I Grant for Atrapos' Novel Targeted Therapy for Eczema

HOUSTON, October 4, 2017 – The National Institute of Health (NIH) has awarded Fannin Innovation Studio® a $243,014 Phase I grant to explore the development of the anti-inflammatory drug PM-43I for the treatment of atopic dermatitis (AD), the most common form of the condition known as eczema. PM-43I is the lead compound being developed by Atrapos Therapeutics, LLC, one of the preclinical portfolio companies of Fannin, a Houston-based life science development group that provides integrated funding and management of early-stage life science startups.

Atrapos is developing targeted immunomodulatory drugs for the treatment of multiple inflammatory conditions including asthma and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF). Given that the pathophysiology of chronic allergic diseases like asthma and AD are related, Atrapos will use the new award to expand its R&D efforts to encompass drug development for this inflammatory skin condition.

While strides have been made over the past two decades towards approval of multiple drugs to better manage symptoms of moderate to severe psoriasis, the same momentum has eluded the AD market. AD in patients is characterized by persistent itchy, red, scaly skin spread over large areas of the body. These symptoms can continue unabated for years, severely compromising quality of life of patients.

AD pathogenesis is thought to be driven by impaired skin barrier function in addition to an underlying systemic immune dysfunction. While regular use of emollients and ointments is prescribed to augment skin care, the immune dysfunction is largely treated by chronic use of immune-suppressive agents such as corticosteroids or topical calcineurin inhibitors. These therapies can cause unwanted side-effects and drug tolerance, resulting in lowered patient compliance to these therapies over time. As a result, there has been an impetus to better understand the specific inflammatory axes driving the disease and developing targeted immunomodulatory therapeutics that can safely and effectively address the allergic symptoms.

Atrapos's lead drug, PM-43I, is a first-in-class small molecule inhibitor of the transcription factors STAT5 and STAT6, which play key roles in modulating signaling pathways that govern the body's allergic immune response. These proteins are downstream of the IL-4 and IL-13 signaling pathway that have been long known to be drivers of the inflammatory cascade characteristic of asthma and AD. Recent approval of drugs like Dupixent® (Regeneron and Sanofi Genzyme's compound dupilumab), an antibody that binds to the IL-4 receptor, has validated the concept of clinically targeting this signaling pathway in AD.

"We are excited to advance PM-43I along the clinical development pathway for a debilitating condition like AD," states Fannin Principal Dev Chatterjee, M.D., Ph.D. "With over 17 million patients suffering from AD in the US, we aim to create a more specific and effective small-molecule therapy targeting a key disease-causing pathway. In addition to prior grants that we have been awarded by the NIH and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) for drug development of PM-43I, this grant will enable us to achieve significant pre-clinical milestones as we explore the efficacy of PM-43I in animal models of AD."

PM-43I was developed by John McMurray, Ph.D., Associate Professor in Experimental Therapeutics at MD Anderson, and David Corry, M.D., Professor and Chief of the Section of Immunology, Allergy and Rheumatology at Baylor College of Medicine. McMurray passed away earlier this year after a battle with glioblastoma. Corry, a noted allergist and immunologist, will continue to develop the therapeutic technology with Atrapos, which has an exclusive license from MD Anderson. "Atrapos' inception started with Dr. McMurray's idea to target the most critical molecules in the inflammatory pathways that I had previously identified and studied. We hoped that modulating these pathways will successfully treat multiple allergic conditions like asthma and AD." says Corry. "Fannin has been instrumental in navigating a difficult regulatory process and obtaining government grants to further the development of our lead molecule and I look forward to working with Atrapos to further develop PM-43I for clinical use."

Atrapos' research and development activities are actively managed by Fannin Principal Dev Chatterjee, M.D., Ph.D., and Fannin Entrepreneurship Fellow Amritha Nair, Ph.D. Managing Partner Atul Varadhachary, M.D., Ph.D. serves as President. "Our partnerships with academic researchers and KOLs at Houston's premier research institutions allow us to collectively translate discoveries from the lab to healthcare innovations that can have a real-world impact on consumer health," said Varadhachary. "These partnerships, along with Fannin's unique development model, will hopefully enable us to progress more technologies down the development pipeline into the clinic."

Atrapos was founded in 2015 and is part of Fannin's growing portfolio of startups commercializing promising technologies including therapeutics, medical devices and diagnostics.

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About Fannin Innovation Studio

Houston-based Fannin Innovation Studio is an early-stage life sciences development group focused exclusively on commercializing medical technologies. Fannin partners with life science innovators to co-found startup companies and provides a pooled management team, funding, and administrative support. To further bridge the commercialization gap, Fannin's internship and fellowship programs provide aspiring entrepreneurs with hands-on development experience with its portfolio companies. For more information, visit www.FanninInnovation.com or email innovate@fannininnovation.com.

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