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UC San Diego Sparks New Cancer-Focused Startup, Oncternal, with Exclusive Antibody License

Oncternal Therapeutics, a new cancer-focused biotechnology startup, has signed a wide-ranging licensing agreement with UC San Diego to develop and commercialize antibodies and antibody-related binding agents.

Oncternal is based on the pioneering research of UC San Diego scientist and clinician Thomas J. Kipps, Distinguished Professor, Evelyn and Edwin Tasch Chair in Cancer Research, and deputy director of research operations at the Moores Cancer Center on campus.

“This is one of the most wide-ranging licensing transactions completed by the Office of Innovation and Commercialization,” said Paul Roben, Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation.

While specific financial terms of the agreement were not announced, “the agreement includes upfront and milestone payments, research funding for the Kipps lab, clinical support, product royalties, and an equity position in Oncternal,” Roben said.

The exclusive worldwide license authorizes Oncternal to develop and commercialize antibodies and antibody-related binding agents that recognize “receptor-tyrosine kinase-like orphan receptor 1” or ROR1.

The agreement also encompasses rights for all therapeutic indications to cirmtuzumab, an anti-ROR1 monoclonal antibody currently in a clinical trial for patients with chronic lymphocytic leukemia; as well as rights to develop antibody-drug conjugates, genetically modified effector immune cells, and bispecific antibodies.

Cirmtuzumab was developed at UC San Diego with funding from the National Institutes of Health, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, and the Blood Cancer Research Fund.

David F. Hale, Chairman of Oncternal Therapeutics, said in a statement, “The scientific work done by Dr. Kipps and his colleagues has been extraordinary, and holds great promise to generate a new wave of first-in-class targeted cancer therapies.”

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