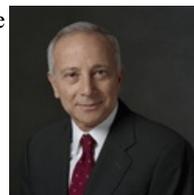


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Novartis inks a string of deals to widen its immuno-oncology arsenal

October 21, 2015 | By Damian Garde

Novartis ([\\$NVS](#)), developing cancer treatments that tap the power of the immune system, signed a pair of agreements to pad its pipeline of new oncology therapies, planning to test them alone and in tandem with in-house assets.



Novartis' Mark Fishman

The Swiss drugmaker acquired a Massachusetts firm called Admune Therapeutics for undisclosed sum, getting its hands on an early-stage treatment that boosts the cytokine interleukin-15, or IL-15, to stimulate an immune attack on cancer. In a separate agreement, Novartis is paying \$15 million up front to Spain's Palobiofarma for the global rights to a Phase I asset that blocks the body's adenosine receptors to unblind immune cells to cancerous growths.

The agreements come a few weeks after Novartis agreed to a deal with Xoma ([\\$XOMA](#)) worth up to \$517 million, licensing an antibody for TGF-beta that similarly aims to take the brakes off of the immune system.

With these latest additions to its pipeline, Novartis now has four immuno-oncology candidates in clinical trials and another 5 on deck to enter Phase I by the end of next year, the company said.

Leading the way is the Phase II CTL019, a so-called CAR-T treatment that rewires a patient's own immune cells to attack blood cancers. Playing catch-up with rivals Merck ([\\$MRK](#)) and Bristol-Myers Squibb ([\\$BMY](#)), Novartis has moved into Phase I with an antibody targeting the immune checkpoint PD-1. Also in Phase I is a treatment targeting myeloid cells and an antibody aimed at the immune-related protein LAG-3. Another program targeting the checkpoint TIM-3 is slated for clinical trials by year's end, Novartis said, and a pair of programs designed to boost the STING and GITR receptors are on tap for 2016.

The broader plan, Novartis said, is to mix and match its many projects in clinical trials with hopes of hitting upon some winning combinations, adding traditional targeted therapies to at once bolster the immune system and intervene in cancer's growth.

"The first wave of immuno-oncology therapies has demonstrated the impact this approach can have in treating certain types of tumors," Novartis R&D chief Mark Fishman said in a statement. "To realize its full potential requires exploration of the complex system of biological pathways in the tumor microenvironment with agents that can stimulate the immune system to attack a wider variety of tumors."

- read the [statement](#)

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