



## **Flanders Interuniversity Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and Apovia AG to Develop Universal Influenza Vaccine**

**Ghent, Belgium and Martinsried, Germany, 30 April 2001** - Flanders Interuniversity Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and Apovia AG announced today that they have entered into a collaboration for the development of a universal influenza vaccine.

Under the terms of the agreement, Apovia will provide VIB with research funding for the preclinical development of the influenza vaccine. In exchange, VIB will grant Apovia the option to an exclusive worldwide license to develop and market the vaccine. Financial details of the agreement were not disclosed.

Influenza is one of the major viral diseases in man, affecting 10 to 15% of the world's population, approximately 43% of whom require medical attention. Timely vaccination can prevent infection, "however, the current generation of vaccines only protects against the virus strain predicted to cause the next epidemic," commented Walter Fiers, Professor Emeritus of the University of Ghent, one of the universities working under the VIB umbrella.

Prof. Fiers and his colleagues published their novel approach for an influenza vaccine in *Nature Medicine* (October 1999). The vaccine is based on the external part of the M2-protein of the influenza A virus, a domain which is nearly invariable. Vaccines based on this external part of M2 are expected to protect against infections by a broad spectrum of influenza A virus strains. The major advantage of this strategy is that such a vaccine potentially protects for multiple years, even against unexpected new influenza A epidemics or pandemics. "Through this collaboration we will combine our promising influenza antigen with Apovia's potent antigen delivery technology, CorVax™," said Rudy Dekeyser, vice-general director of VIB.

Apovia is using its CorVax™ technology to develop vaccines against several infectious diseases. The CorVax™ technology, a modified hepatitis B core protein, is one of the most immunogenic (immune response-stimulating) vaccine carriers known. The genetically modified CorVax™ particles contain pathogen specific epitopes (binding sites) that stimulate high levels of antibody production and prime cellular immunity. The universal influenza vaccine based on the M2 protein presented on CorVax™ would have significant advantages over other influenza vaccines, currently marketed or under development.

Martin Steiner, PhD, CEO of Apovia AG, stated, "The combination of cross-protection and long term immunity against multiple influenza strains, together with the low-costs of manufacturing our vaccine in *E. coli*, would provide a very powerful and competitive tool for influenza management without the limitations in vaccine supply seen with existing solutions."



Apovia AG (formerly EVAX Technologies AG), is a biotechnology company focused on the prevention and therapy of diseases through immune intervention. Apovia AG is headquartered in Martinsried, Germany, and its US subsidiary, Apovia Inc., formed in December 2000 through the acquisition of Immune Complex Corporation, is located in San Diego, California.

Apovia's lead product, MalariVax™ a vaccine to prevent malaria will enter clinical trials in mid 2001.

VIB is a not-for-profit research institute founded in 1996 and based in Flanders. VIB comprises 9 research departments located at 4 Flemish universities. VIB forms a joint venture with these 4 universities. The institute currently counts 720 scientists and technicians and manages a yearly budget exceeding EUR 50 million. Major fields of research are cardiovascular diseases, neurodegenerative diseases, oncology, cell biology, proteomics, functional genomics and plant biotechnology. VIB is actively involved in tech transfer, including building a patent portfolio, licensing, creating start-up companies and exploiting a bio-incubator. VIB also supplies biotech information to the public.

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