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ViroCell, the UK's first clinical trial focused viral vector manufacturer, announces its official launch

ViroCell Biologics ("ViroCell"), founded by the UK's most prolific academic viral vector manufacturing team, today announces its official launch. Viral vectors are the primary delivery method for innovative vaccines such as the Oxford/Astra Zeneca COVID vaccine, as well as enabling inputs for the manufacture of the rapidly growing Cell and Gene Therapy sector ("CGT").

ViroCell aims to be the supplier of choice for viral vectors and gene modified cells, to academic and corporate clients, for translational cell and gene therapies going into clinical trials. ViroCell has assembled the UK's most experienced viral vector manufacturing team to support its heavy operational demand and is now building out further manufacturing capability to address the current, acute supply chain bottlenecks worldwide. ViroCell is deploying significant capital and management talent around the viral vector design and manufacturing track record of **Farzin Farzaneh**, PhD – Professor of Molecular Medicine at King's College London, and expects to employ more than 50 professionals in the UK by the end of 2021.

The fast-growing demand in viral vectors for clinical trials makes clear the pressing need for a highly experienced commercial Contract Development and Manufacturing Organization ("CDMO") that can leverage the best of the UK's world-leading heritage by investing in new capacity, to design and deliver viral vectors for clinical trials faster and more reliably.

The curative potential seen from the first wave of approved CGTs, is driving new company formation and external investment into therapies heading for clinical trial. The internationally renowned ViroCell team has contributed to innovative therapies to combat childhood inherited genetic diseases from muscular dystrophy to lysosomal storage disorders; and in adult acquired diseases from leukemia to solid tumours.

ViroCell is negotiating with world-leading teaching hospitals and universities to bring more clean room facilities for the production of viral vectors in UK. The company, an innovation driven CDMO, founded in 2020 by the Truell Conservation Foundation and serial biotech entrepreneur, **John W. Hadden II**, has market leading cell and gene therapy expertise and decades of experience in oncology innovation through its world-class Scientific Advisory Board ("SAB").

SAB Chairman **Ferid Murad**, MD, PhD, co-winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Medicine, said, *“I am delighted to chair this accomplished group and to help ViroCell innovate to support the advancement of the cell and gene therapy community.”*

In addition to **Farzin Farzaneh**¹ and **Ferid Murad**, the SAB has embraced eminent leaders in the field:

- **Evren Alici**, MD, PhD - Senior researcher and group leader in Hematology at Karolinska Institutet (KI), Department of Medicine, Stockholm, Sweden and co-director of NextGenNK, an international Competence Center for the development of next-generation NK cell-based cancer immunotherapies
- **Jean-Pierre Bizzari**, MD – SAB member of the French National Cancer Institute (INCa) and European Organization of Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) and Chairman of the New Drug Advisory Committee. He was formerly Executive Vice-President, Group Head, Clinical Oncology Development (U.S., Europe, and Asia/Japan) at Celgene from 2008 to 2015
- **Mark Lowdell**, PhD – Professor of Cell and Tissue Therapy at University College London and Director of Cellular Therapy at the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust
- **Peter Harper**, MD – Medical Oncologist, Founder of the Oncology Department at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, the London Oncology Clinic, and Welbeck Health Partners
- **Paul G. Richardson**, MD – Clinical Program Leader and Director of Clinical Research, Jerome Lipper Multiple Myeloma Center, Dana Farber Cancer Institute, and RJ Corman Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School

Edmund Truell, chairman of the Truell Conservation Foundation, said *“We have been studying the viral vector supply-demand imbalance with great interest. We believe that the shortage of highly specialised design and manufacturing capacity and the UK’s hitherto uncommercial attitude to new vector innovation, represents a clear barrier to gene therapy innovation. Following the remarkable success of the UK Covid vaccine programme and Kate Bingham’s galvanizing call to arms, this imbalance can now be changed for good.”*

Truell continued: *“Prof. Farzaneh’s leadership in developing and manufacturing viral vectors will build on the excellent genetics research at the Wellcome Sanger Institute; King’s College London and other world-class centres of academic research; and our globally powerful pharmaceutical sector. We are delighted to capitalise and invest in ViroCell to accelerate the novel therapies that ViroCell’s clients are developing by enabling them to enter clinical trials faster and so help millions of patients.”*

John W. Hadden II, a longtime colleague of Truell and Farzaneh and Co-Founder of ViroCell, will lead the business as CEO while Prof. Farzaneh will lead vector design as Chief Scientific

¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9275-2415>

Officer. Hadden commented, *“It is exciting to join trusted partners to take Farzin’s vision and vector manufacturing leadership to the next level. Over the last 20 years, Farzin’s team has led the successful creation and manufacturing of over 100 viral vectors for dozens of CGT clinical trials around the world. With additional capital and the support of an experienced management structure, we look forward to extending and expanding on this tradition of life sciences innovation and leadership.”*

-ENDS-

NOTES TO THE EDITOR:

ViroCell Biologics

ViroCell Biologics’ mission is to be the design and GMP-compliant viral vector creator of choice for corporate and academic cell and gene therapy innovators preparing for and in early-stage clinical trials. ViroCell specializes in batch sizes between 1L to 50L. Initially ViroCell will manufacture lentivirus and gamma-retrovirus vectors and gene-modified cells for clients; and will soon add AAV manufacturing capabilities.

ViroCell is also investing to develop the next generation of viral vectors for the targeted introduction and expression of therapeutic genes in specific cell types, also called “Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products,” including vectors for direct injection as drug products to patients.

For more information, visit www.virocell.com or follow ViroCell on LinkedIn or Twitter.

Truell Conservation Foundation

Truell Conservation Foundation was founded by Edmund Truell, a private equity pioneer and pensions innovator, and his late brother, Daniel Truell, who most recently served as the Chief Investment Officer of The Wellcome Trust, to support *NetPositive* impact.

The Charity’s aim is to ‘make money for charity by being *good investors*.’ The proceeds, which have been many tens of millions so far, have been deployed to support:

- Conservation efforts around the world;
- Veterans and their families, especially by the provision of educational opportunity;
- Promote the provision of better, safer pensions;
- Develop disruptive renewable energy solutions;
and to
- Advance new therapies and rehabilitation centres to treat human disease and conditions

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