Potential world premiere in cancer diagnostics

Sweden-based Immunovia has developed a new method for using a blood test to detect and diagnose pancreatic cancer. With Immunovia's test, diagnosis can be made earlier which creates much better chances to treat the cancer. The company has teamed up with the University of Liverpool and with the widely publicised Knight Cancer Institute at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) to perform clinical studies and to make the blood test available as soon as possible, as Mats Grahn, CEO of this publicly listed company, explains.

Immunovia AB was founded in 2007 by investigators from the Department of Immunotechnology at Lund University and CREATE Health, the Center for Translational Cancer Research in Lund, Sweden. After being awarded a € 4.2 million grant, from the EU research and innovation framework programme Horizon 2020, in March, the company completed its initial public offering on the Nasdaq First North exchange in December 2015.

The IPO was just one of the many highlights in Immunovia's recent history, says Mr. Grahn. In October 2015, the company formed a collaboration with the Knight Cancer Institute at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) to help confirm, validate and commercialise a blood test for the early diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. Working with the Knight Cancer Institute is special, says Mr. Grahn. "The Institute, led by professsor Brian Druker, raised 1 billion USD in the summer of 2015 to radically transform cancer care as we know it today, by early detection of lethal cancers. Immunovia became one of the first companies they teamed up with last year." The company formed a complementary collaboration with the University of Liverpool, just recently.

Research results so far have been more than encouraging. In a 1,400-sample retrospective trial, evaluating its IMMray PanCan-d proteomic test for pancreatic cancer and completed in December last year, the PanCan-d test was able to distinguish between 149 patients with stage I and II pancreatic cancer and 700 healthy controls with accuracy of 96 percent. It distinguished between these healthy controls and patients in all stages of pancreatic cancer with a pretty amazing accuracy of 98 percent. The plan is to start commercialising the test in 2017, says Mr. Grahn. The company has its own antibody library, antibody production and purification as well as its own chip/array production, as well as ground breaking bioinformatics, so all facilities for commercialisation are in place.

The blood test would be a major step forward in the treatment of pancreatic cancer. 5 year survival rates in pancreatic cancer are as low as 5% when diagnosed at the late stages of the disease; it is extremely difficult to detect at an early stage with conventional diagnostics. Diagnosing patients in early stages could increase the overall 5-year survival rate from less than 5 % to over 50 %, says Mr. Grahn. Once their test is perfected and prompted on the market, the company will continue to develop similar tests for other cancers and for autoimmune disease such as lupus (SLE).

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