Focus on proprietary development

Denmark-based Zealand Pharma A/S is a leader in the development of novel peptide medicines. The company is advancing a proprietary pipeline of novel medicines alongside a partnered product and development portfolio. Britt Meelby Jensen, Zealand CEO, explains why the development of their stable glucagon product, currently in Phase 1, is important in growing the value of Zealand's proprietary pipeline.

Jensen was appointed as Zealand CEO on January 15, 2015, having previously held numerous senior roles at Novo Nordisk, among others. Her appointment underscored that Zealand is entering a new phase in its development. "We have increased focus on advancing our proprietary pipeline products longer ourselves, and where it makes sense all the way to registration. It's attractive to get a bigger share of the pie for us, while continuing our partnerships with big pharmaceutical companies on part of the portfolio. "

Founded in 1998, Zealand has been successful through partnerships over the years. It has teamed up with Boehringer Ingelheim, twice, notably. Its first invented medicine, an agonist for the treatment of Type 2 diabetes, is marketed globally (outside the US) as Lyxumia®, with filing in the US this July. Lyxumia® is in Phase III development as a once daily single-injection combination with Lantus® (LixiLan), with results coming out this quarter, both products under a global license agreement with Sanofi. The agreement with Sanofi was signed in 2003, where it made perfect sense to partner as the clinical programme required thousands of patients, says Jensen.

She has different ideas for their wholly owned and invented glucagon analogue, however, and believes the product is well suited to be developed beyond the early stage, by Zealand itself. The company recently announced satisfactory results from a clinical Phase I trial with a single-dose version of the product, a novel glucagon analogue under development under the ZP4207 name. Jensen explains that they are developing the product as a more convenient and easier to use rescue pen, when compared to alternative treatments of severe hypoglycaemia. Severe hypoglycaemia is an acute, life threatening condition affecting both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes patients on insulin therapy when their blood sugar levels drop too low. Simultaneously, the company is also evaluating a multiple-dose version of ZP4207 in a clinical Phase I trial for the treatment of mild to moderate hypoglycaemia including its potential use in a dual-hormone artificial pancreas pump.

"We are very happy that the results of the Phase I trial support the potential we see for our proprietary stable glucagon product as a ready-to-use rescue pen for severe hypoglycaemia," says Jensen. " Hypoglycaemia remains a major concern for patients, and the American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends that all patients with Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes on insulin therapy carry a glucagon kit with them at all times. Today's treatments are effective, but have proven very difficult to use as they contain lyophilized glucagon powder and a syringe with diluent, that needs to be diligently mixed right before injection. This is not easy, hence many patients ends up in the emergency room after a severe hypoglycaemic episode. The ready-to-use pen from Zealand is a liquid formulation that is ready to inject. This should offer patients convenience and peace of mind."

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