FINANCE

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP ROUNDUP

By Mark Zipkin, Staff Writer

PPP activity was down slightly in 3Q15 compared with the previous quarter, with 61 partnerships announced during that span. Big pharmas and biotechs continue to pair up with public and academic institutions at a high rate, taking part in 13 of the third quarter deals. Of those 13 partnerships, GlaxoSmithKline plc and AstraZeneca plc were each involved in four, including one that involved both pharmas. (See "Drug Connection." *BioCentury Innovations* (Aug. 20, 2015))

WUXI NEXTCODE'S CHINESE MOVE

As precision medicine gathers steam in the U.S. and Europe through private and public initiatives, Chinese genomics company WuXi NextCODE is launching its pediatric diagnostics activities in China with a partnership with the Children's Hospital of Fudan University (CHFU) that will give it access to over 900,000 patients a year.

The company, a subsidiary of WuXi PharmaTech Inc., was formed in January following the acquisition of NextCODE, a spinout of deCode genetics Inc., to merge the whole genome and exome data mining capabilities of NextCODE with the sequencing capabilities at WuXi's Genome Center in Shanghai.

The deal is the first to bring WuXi NextCODE to a Chinese hospital and aims to perform genome sequencing on children with rare diseases for diagnostic purposes and to build databases for research projects. CHFU will identify and manage care for patients who are candidates for the genomic screening based on diagnosis. WuXi NextCODE will perform the sequencing, informatics and analysis, and will connect patient profiles with those in other hospitals utilizing WuXi NextCODE's rare disease pediatric sequencing tests.

Jeff Gulcher, co-founder and CSO of WuXi NextCODE, told BioCentury, "That was a big part of this — to be able to cross-match results from rare cases that are very difficult to solve within one institution, and connect the dots." Gulcher said looking at similar genomic profiles for patients in another WuXi NextCODE-connected center such as Boston Children's Hospital could help researchers identify a new gene in a rare disease.

Hannes Smárason, co-founder, president and COO of WuXi NextCODE, told BioCentury that the partners are not disclosing financial details but expect the profits for WuXi NextCODE to be driven by the volume of cases they expect to see through CHFU. The company expects to test up to 40% of the 2.3 million patients that come through the hospital each year, and the laboratory has already seen hundreds of cases since the official September 16 launch.

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WuXi NextCODE followed that launch with the October 6 announcement of a new deal with Sidra Medical and Research Center to utilize the company's genomics platform in diagnosing disease for several research projects, and to connect sequencing data with patients' electronic medical records. The collaboration will also build an Arab reference genome, and along with Qatar BioBank is part of the country's initiative to conduct a Qatar Genome Project to mirror that of Iceland.

BMS TANGLED UP IN FIBROSIS

In another move to expand its pipeline in fibrotic diseases, Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. announced a multi-year collaboration in July with the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC). The deal will use BMS's preclinical and clinical compounds to expand understanding of the mechanisms leading to fibrosis in different organs, in particular scleroderma, diabetic kidney disease and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF).

The collaboration will focus on disease pathology and biomarkers to further illuminate the connections between the mechanisms common to fibrotic diseases, an area of growing interest for BMS that the pharma announced in its updated R&D strategy in 2013. Since then, BMS has moved three drug