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A snapshot of Crescendo Biologics

PME talks to CEO Theodora Harold

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By Lucy Parsons

In this October's issue of PME, we take an in-depth look at Crescendo Biologics and talk to CEO Theodora Harold (pictured above) about the company's technologies and the obstacles it faces in the biotech sector.

With a pipeline promising first-in-class T-cell enhancers, Crescendo has attracted big investments from the pharma industry as its platform attracts global attention. The company is based in Cambridge, UK, which is renowned for its antibody and biologics research and expertise, making it a prime location for Crescendo's work.

What is the central focus of Crescendo's research?

The company is focused on T-cell enhancement to develop new ways to treat difficult cancer types. The biotech's pipeline is focused on harnessing the body's own immune system by boosting it to address difficult-to-treat tumours, including those found in lung, renal and breast cancer.

Crescendo's lead programme is CB307, a novel, bispecific molecule that simultaneously binds to the CD137 (or '4-1BB') receptor on T cells and PSMA protein on tumour cells. This molecule is designed for the treatment of prostate and other PSMA-positive tumours, such as lung, renal or breast tumours.

How is Crescendo advancing life sciences with its technology?

Crescendo aims to use its Humabody technology to create the next generation of immune therapies. Our T-cell-enhancing molecules are designed to boost the body's natural immune system to either further improve

patient outcomes – in those cancers where existing immunotherapies are already having some success – or to make advances in those cancers that are still difficult to treat in this way.

What makes the company's technologies stand out in a crowded field?

The mAbs treatment class has proved to be one of the most successful therapeutic classes of drug. Our technology is based on fully human single VH domains, generated from our triple knock- out transgenic mouse which carries fully human immunoglobulin genes.

VHs are the smallest antigen-binding portion of an antibody – approximately one-tenth the size of a normal mAb. Being already fully human, Humabodies do not require complex humanisation steps and are expected to be less immunogenic than alternative small protein formats.

Due to their small size, Humabodies can penetrate more deeply into tumours compared to traditional antibodies and, once there, they have impressive accumulation, increasing their effectiveness and lowering the likelihood of off- target effects.

Humabodies can be assembled into multi- specific formats that cannot be replicated with mAbs – this modular nature allows us to tap novel biology.

Why will Crescendo make it in the high- risk, highly competitive biotech field?

Aside from our pipeline of first-in-class T-cell enhancers and differentiated technology platform, I would say that it is our talented and highly motivated staff that will help us achieve our ambitious goals, together with the quality and experience of our board.

Cambridge, UK is probably the leading antibody and biologics development location in Europe. We are supported by a top tier syndicate of investors from both Europe and Asia, have a partnership with Takeda worth up to $790m and recently raised a Series B financing of $70m.

What are the practical business issues that the company is facing?

We have ambitious plans and, like most biotechs, at some point in the future we will want to raise additional funds to grow the next phase of the business. This is not an issue at the moment due to our recent strong financing round, but is rather something that we would want to look at in the future.

What impact will Brexit have on the business?

The possibility of a no-deal Brexit and the weaker pound are not helpful for attracting key talent, especially from Europe. Continental EU citizens have been a major source of recruitment for us. However, we continue to support our staff and are well prepared to deal with any challenges that arise from Brexit.

Crescendo is on track to begin its first clinical trial next year with its lead candidate CB307 and it also has a pipeline of follow-on, first-in-class T-cell enhancers.