



INHERITED BREAST CANCER VIRUS TEST PACT SIGNED BY TULANE AND AUTOIMMUNE TECHNOLOGIES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW ORLEANS, February 23, 2000 - Autoimmune Technologies LLC, a New Orleans biomedical company, today announced the signing of an agreement with Tulane University Medical Center that could lead to the development of new diagnostic tests for breast cancer. Based on a cancer virus recently discovered at Tulane, the tests could help determine if a woman is likely to develop breast cancer and possibly help detect early stage breast tumors. Autoimmune Technologies will evaluate the virus technology under an option agreement.

Tulane researchers have identified a virus that is present in the tumor cells of about 90 percent of women who have breast cancer. This virus, which they have called Human Mammary Tumor Virus or HMTV, is an endogenous retrovirus. Endogenous retroviruses are not typically spread by infection from one person to another, but rather are inherited from parent to child along with the parent's genes.

HMTV is genetically very similar to the virus known to cause cancer in mice. Researchers have known about the mouse virus since the 1930s and have long searched for a human version. Dr. Robert F. Garry, a professor of Microbiology and Immunology at Tulane whose laboratory discovered the virus, said "Molecular techniques have evolved rapidly over the past decade, and we now have much more sensitive methods to apply to the study of genetic material. These techniques have finally allowed us to identify a virus that we and others have spent many years looking for."

Dr. Garry found in his preliminary work that about 20 percent of women have inherited the endogenous virus. These women do not currently have breast cancer, but his findings suggest that approximately 90 percent of future breast cancer cases will arise from this relatively small group of women. Dr. Garry continues to study HMTV and is working to confirm his current findings and determine how this virus may be involved in the development of breast cancer.

An epidemiological study published in the January 19, 2000 issue of the *British Journal of Cancer* further strengthens the theory that human breast cancer is caused by a virus (*Br J Cancer* 2000 Jan; 82:446-451). This study, by Dr. T.H.M. Stewart et al, showed a clear correlation between the geographical range of one particular subspecies of mice and the incidence of human breast cancer. This particular strain of mouse carries mouse mammary tumor virus, which is closely related to HMTV.

Dr. Russell B. Wilson, president of Autoimmune Technologies, said "Dr. Garry's work has the potential to revolutionize our knowledge of breast cancer. Breast cancer will strike between 10 percent and 15 percent of U.S. women sometime in their lifetimes and is a continuing grave concern to all women. We hope that Dr. Garry's work will lead to new diagnostic tests that will help combat this onerous disease."

The agreement between Autoimmune Technologies and Tulane covers the development of HMTV diagnostic tests and the worldwide use of these tests except in Asia. Tulane plans to enter into

agreements with other organizations for the Asian diagnostic test rights and the rights to develop vaccines and drugs based on the HMTV discovery. The financial terms of the agreement between Tulane and Autoimmune Technologies were not announced.

Autoimmune Technologies is a privately held company that is using proprietary medical research discoveries to develop medical diagnostic tests, explore disease mechanisms, and investigate therapies for autoimmune diseases and other disorders.

For further information, please visit www.autoimmune.com.

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