

GSK and Yale to partner on drug discovery development

Yale UniversityYale University

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Yale University will partner to design a new class of molecules to target disease-causing proteins. This is the latest in a string of deals between Yale's academic researchers and global pharmaceutical companies.

The British pharmaceutical giant has entered into similar collaborations with several universities in the United Kingdom, but the deal with Yale is the first in the United States. Under the agreement, the company is granted first chance to license promising protein-destroying drug candidates discovered in a research collaboration between GlaxoSmithKline and the laboratory of Craig Crews, the Lewis B. Cullman Professor of Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology, and professor of chemistry and of pharmacology at Yale.

The deal comes on the heels of other agreements signed by Yale with Gilead Sciences Inc., which is working with Yale to identify novel cancer therapeutics, and with Johnson & Johnson, which is also interested in drug candidates being developed at Yale's West Campus.

"This is another example of how pharmaceutical companies have come to recognize Yale's ability to work with them collaboratively to turn research into new therapies," said Jon Soderstrom, managing director of Yale's Office of Cooperative Research, which negotiated the agreement.

Crews and colleagues have designed molecules that can bind disease-causing proteins that are impervious to existing drugs, and target those proteins to the cell's housecleaning machinery, which degrades proteins that are no longer needed. The goal is to create an entirely new class of drugs.

"Only a fraction, about 20 percent, of proteins of interest are susceptible to current drugs," Crews said. "The remaining majority of proteins are what we call 'undruggable.' We have come up with a way that for the first time makes them pharmaceutically vulnerable."

Under the agreement, GSK will then have the right to use this technology for multiple disease-causing proteins across all therapy areas. For each protein-destroying drug discovered and developed, the University will be eligible for milestone and royalty payments

The partnership will help streamline the process of drug development by helping promising research jump from the academic lab directly to the pharmaceutical company pipeline, said Kristoffer Famm, who is directing GSK's effort in this collaboration.

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“The work Crews’ lab has done over the last couple of years can really open up this technology for therapeutic use,” Famm said. “I believe the joint force of Yale and GSK is a close to an ideal combination.”

Crews, who also serves as director of the Center for Molecular Discovery, explained that many drug companies no longer focus on early stage drug discovery due to cutbacks and those that are still committed to drug discovery, like GSK, are seeking new, more effective ways to do so. The advanced technology at West Campus allows academic research scientists at Yale to help meet that need, he said.

“This allows us to fulfill one of the mandates of our federally-supported research — to show a societal benefit of our work,” Crews said.

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