Deciphera Pharmaceuticals and the University of Kansas Cancer Center team up for clinical study of leukemia drug

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Lawrence and Kansas City, Kan. – Deciphera Pharmaceuticals LLC and The University of Kansas Cancer Center have opened a local clinical trial for a drug that researchers hope will work for certain leukemia patients who have no other options when they have failed other drug therapies.

This Phase 1 study is testing the safety and preliminary efficacy of a drug known as DCC-2036, which blocks the cancer-causing enzyme BCR-ABL. It is being studied in patients with chronic myeloid leukemia or acute lymphoblastic leukemia who have grown resistant to other types of treatment. DCC-2036 blocks many drug-resistant variants of BCR-ABL, including the T315I variant resistant to all currently marketed therapies. The University of Kansas Cancer Center will be the fourth site for the study, which already includes patients at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Tufts Medical Center in Boston, and The University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center in Ann Arbor.

“Our research focuses on the development of unique agents that block a number of different enzymes, called kinases, that cause more than 50 types of cancer. These ‘kinase inhibitors,’ we believe, will provide best-in-class therapies for many cancer patients,” says Daniel Flynn, CEO of Deciphera Pharmaceuticals, the Lawrence-based company that developed the drug.

Therapies currently exist for patients with these types of leukemia, Flynn says, but some patients are not able to take them. Other patients develop resistance after taking them for awhile. “We’re very keen on understanding the mechanisms of resistance, and determining why current drugs lose their effectiveness,” Flynn says. “Our approach is to block these kinases and prevent even the drug resistant variants from adopting aggressive, cancer-causing forms.” The Deciphera drug is an oral agent – patients take tablet forms of DCC-2036 by mouth.

Deciphera and cancer center leaders are enthusiastic about the potential for turning research discoveries into benefits for cancer patients in the region and collaborating to advance the pharmaceutical industry in Kansas.

“We are pleased to work with The University of Kansas Cancer Center as we grow oncology bioscience, research, and development in the Kansas region,” Flynn said.

“It is an exciting opportunity for us to treat our patients with this novel and promising anti-leukemia drug in this trial,” says Kapil Bhalla, MD, deputy director of The University of Kansas Cancer Center. “This will prevent our patients from traveling to MD Anderson or elsewhere for this treatment at a time when their disease is not responding to the standard treatments for chronic myeloid leukemia.”

The trial is limited to patients who have failed to see results from two kinase-blocking drugs or eventually became resistant to them. To enroll in the trial, people should contact Bhalla’s research nurse Kendra Ford, MSN, RN, at (913) 588-4787 or page (913) 917-1136.

About The KU Cancer Center

The University of Kansas Cancer Center is transforming cancer research and clinical care by linking an innovative approach to drug discovery, delivery, and development to a nationally accredited patient care program. The partnership includes cancer research and healthcare professionals associated with the University of Kansas Medical Center and The University of Kansas Hospital in Kansas City, the University of Kansas in Lawrence, the University of Kansas School of Medicine in Wichita, and the members of the Midwest Cancer Alliance Partners Advisory Board and Clinical Trials Network. For more information on The University of Kansas Cancer Center’s research

and outreach programs and award-winning patient care offered at the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Care Pavilion and The University of Kansas Cancer Center, please visit www.kucancercenter.org or call 1-800-332-6048.