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Commentary Open Access

Development, Testing and Marketing of the Lytic Peptide Conjugates

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Commentary

In 1995, at a meeting in Olsztyn, Poland, Dr. Rao, from Louisville, presented data to show that a number of cancers, including breast, pancreatic, ovarian, testes and prostate, expressed receptors for the Luteinizing Hormone Releasing Hormone (LHRH).

Knowing of the lytic peptides (short chain compounds that destroy cell membranes), I conceived the idea of making a targeted anti-cancer drug. Immediately upon returning to the Pennington Biomedical Research Center, I formed a team consisting of a pathologist (Dr. Fred Enright), a Biochemist (Dr. Carola Leuschner), and a Chemist (Martha Juban). This team tested a number of the LHRH conjugates for their abilities to stop growth of the cancer cells listed above in the nude mouse model.

A company (Esperance Pharmaceuticals, Inc.) was formed to take their lead compound, EP-100, to market. Dr. Hector Alila, a former post-doctoral student, was hired as CEO. Recently, Esperance formed an alliance with M.D. Anderson, the world's largest cancer center. Women who have become resistant to the standard treatment (paclitaxel) are then treated with EP-100. Hundreds of patients are involved.

The success of the LHRHr-lytic peptides, a new class of anti-cancer drugs, is attributable, in large part to scientists at the William Hansel Cancer Prevention Laboratory at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center.