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Australian Trade Commission



Case Study | Takeda Pharmaceutical Company

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Japan's Takeda Pharmaceutical Company joins forces with Australian research institutes

A partnership between Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Limited and Australia's Monash University hopes to revolutionise treatments for gastrointestinal conditions.

The three-year research investment project will see Australian university teams collaborate with Takeda to advance the scientific understanding of gastrointestinal disorders and devise new therapies.

Based in Osaka, Japan, Takeda is Japan's largest pharmaceuticals company. It has 18 research and development sites across Japan, the Americas, Europe and Asia and has over 31,000 employees in 100 countries.

Dr Gareth Hicks, Head of Gastroenterology Drug Discovery Unit, Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Limited, said the funding seeks to capitalise on world-class basic research being conducted at Australian universities.

'Australia has a major presence in the field of gastrointestinal research and several world-renowned laboratories,' said Dr Hicks.

'Monash University - together with Flinders University, Melbourne University and the University of Adelaide - constitutes a real centre of excellence in this area of neurogastroenterology basic research.'

Launched in December 2014, Takeda's investment is one of the biggest collaborative research projects undertaken by a Japanese pharmaceuticals company and Australian universities.

The project will be led by the Monash Institute for Pharmaceutical Sciences (MIPS) and will seek to collaborate with existing research networks, including a team from the University of Adelaide.

Professor Nigel Bunnett, National Health and Medical Research Council Australia Fellow, Deputy Director of MIPS and project lead hailed the initiative and its prospects for finding effective treatments.



Takeda scientists undertaking research

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'We have a breadth of experience in investigating the biological basis of disease, and a track record in drug discovery and development,' said Professor Bunnett.

'This investment from Takeda allows us to extend our research - it is tremendously exciting.'

A global leader in developing new treatments

Takeda's investment also marks a new and significant initiative into the discovery of new agents for treating gastrointestinal conditions.

Founded 230 years ago, Takeda has already developed many globally successful treatments. This has included gastrointestinal disorders and treatments in many other areas of medicine, including cardiovascular and

metabolic; oncology; central nervous system; respiratory; and vaccines.

In 2014, the company created a new global Gastrointestinal Drug-Discovery Unit headquartered in Boston, United States.

'Many gastrointestinal diseases are poorly understood and have few effective treatments,' said Dr Hicks.

'From disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), to diseases such as ulcerative colitis, these conditions affect millions of people worldwide.'

Australia: home to world-class clinical research

After touring Monash University and other medical research facilities, Dr Hicks concluded that Australian scientific research institutes were an ideal partner for international companies, particularly for Takeda.

'To the outsider, Australian science is very collaborative.

'Top-grade research networks already exist between experts in different faculties and institutes. Collaboration appears very strong and is reflected in people's attitude.

'The Commonwealth Government grant system often requires collaboration, and this appears to drive strong relationships,' added Dr Hicks.

Austrade has also been a key advocate, providing assistance to Takeda's team in Japan over many years. This has included market advice and introductions to Australian industry leaders.

Monash leads multi-institute collaboration

Melbourne-based MIPS constitutes Australia's largest pharmaceutical sciences research program into translational drug discovery. It has the experience of taking research into drug treatments to the stage required for clinical trials, which proved critically important to Takeda.

'Monash is a great institution to partner with. We know they have delivered many molecules to clinical trials, and science conducted by MIPS is focussed on therapeutics. Signing the partnership was a win-win for us,' said Dr Hicks.

Research teams will investigate treatments for gastrointestinal diseases, including inflammatory diseases such as ulcerative colitis, Crohn's Disease, IBS, and motility disorders such as severe constipation.

Novel therapeutic approaches – including nanoparticle delivery of drugs to the relevant receptor targets – will also be a focus.

The work at MIPS will complement and bring together research ongoing at other institutes in the region, including the University of Adelaide. Much of the

research will be conducted by virtual teams working across different university departments.

The goal for each team is to create a new class of therapeutic drugs. If successful, the drugs will help to alleviate the principal symptoms associated with gastrointestinal disorders, which include pain, diarrhoea, constipation and pruritus.

Partnership breaks ground for further research

Dr Hicks added the current investment could also herald a broader collaborative partnership, as Takeda examines the possibilities of working with other Australian research institutes in the area of gastrointestinal disease area and potentially other areas that match the company's interests.

'This is a three-year collaboration that can keep growing,' said Dr Hicks.

'There is strong potential for Australian scientists to come and work in Takeda laboratories, and for our scientists to go and work in Australia. We are looking to build more teams in Australia, and we will repeat what we believe to be a unique model.

'Collaborations like the MIPS partnership is one reason why scientists like me enjoy working in the pharmaceutical industry; so we can work with the best minds to bring new therapeutic agents to patients, as quickly as possible, and make people's lives better. I am passionate about working with gastrointestinal disease experts in Australia,' added Dr Hicks.

About Austrade

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