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Merck & Co inks pact with Advaxis

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Merck has collaborated with Advaxis to study the combination of Advaxis's Lm-LLO cancer immunotherapy, and pembrolizumab Merck's investigational anti PD-1 antibody, for the treatment of prostate cancer.

The collaboration will evaluate Advaxis' Lm (Listeria monocytogenes)-LLO cancer immunotherapy, ADXS-PSA as a monotherapy and in combination with pembrolizumab in a Phase I/II study of patients with previously treated metastatic, castration-resistant prostate cancer. The study is expected to begin in early 2015.

"We are excited to be working with Merck. Equally as exciting is the combination potential of our Lm-LLO immunotherapy with Merck's anti-PD-1 immune checkpoint inhibitor. We believe that the combination of Advaxis Lm-LLO cancer immunotherapies and checkpoint inhibitors holds significant promise for the treatment of prostate and other cancers," said Mr Daniel J O'Connor, president and chief executive officer, Advaxis, in a statement.

Mr Eric Rubin, head of oncology, Merck research laboratories, said, "Collaborations like this are an integral part of the company's strategy to evaluate the potential of pembrolizumab in multiple combinations." Pembrolizumab is currently being evaluated across more than 30 types of cancers as a monotherapy and in combination with other drugs.

The financial details of the deal were not disclosed. Reportedly, Advaxis will fund the study, while both companies will collaboratively oversee the conduct of the study.

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