

November 2006

MARKERS

News Roundup

DNA INTERFERENCE

PRONAI EMERGES FROM STEALTH MODE WITH DNA SILENCER

The Nobel may have gone to RNA interference, but some folks out in Kalamazoo, Mich., think they can make a name for themselves by interfering with DNA instead.

ProNAi (pronounced pro-nye) Therapeutics, founded in April 2004, has spent the last couple of years proving and building up technology licensed out of Wayne State University. The idea seems simple: using “a single-stranded DNA oligo to target non-transcribed regions of the genome,” says **Robert Forgey**, COO and one of the founders of the company.

Richard Gill, president and CEO, says the advantage is being “further up the cascade” from RNA and proteins. “We’re trying to show that you should be able to use lower dosages and get higher efficacy [because you’re targeting] one or two copies of DNA instead of thousands of copies of RNA.”

The first target for a DNAi-based therapy is cancer, and the company’s lead molecule has shown efficacy both *in vivo* and *in vitro*,

Forgey says. Now the ProNAi team is focusing on turning the molecule into “a very refined pharmaceutical formulation,” he adds. That goal was advanced in the past year by adding an R&D contingent that was well-versed in developing a drug and bringing it to market, Forgey says. The company currently has 12 employees and a number of collaborations with external researchers.

In the coming months, the company will push not only to advance its lead molecule to the clinic, but also to familiarize the community with the DNAi concept. “You’ll see us moving to peer-reviewed publications,” says Gill. “You’ll see us build collaborations even more.” Gill is also working to build up ProNAi’s coffers: last month, he expected to complete a round of bridge funding in the single-digit millions. He has been working to follow the team’s series A round of \$4.2 million with a series B financing as well.

— Meredith Salisbury



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