

NUC case study

Consultancy with two pharmaceutical companies – Dr Michael Stocks

Dr Michael Stocks, from the School of Pharmacy at the University of Nottingham, is lending his expertise in drug discovery to two pharmaceutical companies through consultancy work managed by Nottingham University Consultants (NUC). Dr Stocks has over 20 years of experience in Medicinal Chemistry in the pharmaceutical industry, having previously worked at drug-discovery companies including Fisons, Astra and AstraZeneca. His background in this area has left him well placed to offer companies guidance on science matters and the direction that their research should take.

HitGen, a start-up biopharmaceuticals company based in Chengdu, China, was one of the companies to benefit from Dr Stocks' expertise. The company, founded in June 2012, is focussed on the early stages of drug discovery - hit identification through to lead optimisation through the establishment of a proprietary DNA-encoded library lead discovery technology.



Dr Stocks helped to establish the backbone of HitGen – advising on the recruitment of scientists during the early days of the company as well as providing drug discovery training to their scientists. Dr Stocks continues to sit on the Science Advisory Board, where he oversees their project portfolio and helps them address Medicinal or Synthetic Chemistry issues related to drug discovery.

HitGen has experienced rapid growth, now with over 100 members of staff and has recently entered a partnership with The University of Manchester's Cancer Research UK Manchester Institute Drug Discovery Group using HitGen's proprietary DNA-encoded library lead discovery technology. Within the framework of the collaboration, hundreds of millions of small molecules will be screened to discover and advance drug candidates against multiple new oncology targets of interest to the Cancer Research UK Manchester Institute.

KalVista Pharmaceuticals Ltd. is a UK-based SME specialising in ophthalmology with an initial focus on diabetic macular edema (DME) – the most common cause of vision loss in working-age adults.

Being a small company, KalVista needed additional medicinal chemistry support – so Dr Stocks joined them on a consultancy basis to provide direction in this area. Dr Stocks has also helped the company complete a grant application to the Technology Strategy Board, leading them to successfully secure a £2.4m Biomedical Catalyst Grant. This funding is being used to accelerate the development of an oral treatment for DME, through the lead discovery and

optimisation phases to prepare a selection of high-quality compounds for selection of a candidate drug to eventually enter clinical development.

"Dr Stocks brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in oral drug discovery and with his support KalVista has rapidly advanced the oral plasma kallikrein programme for DME." said Dr Robert Haigh, COO of KalVista.

Dr Stocks said: "I see external consultancy as a very rewarding addition to my own research and teaching role in Nottingham. Consultancy affords valuable insight into cutting edge drug discovery research in both the UK and the emerging Chinese pharmaceutical environment. Working through consultancy builds collaborations, enabling applications for research funding giving early career researchers the opportunity to experience modern day drug discovery within the School of Pharmacy."



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