Anavo Therapeutics Launches with EUR 20 Million Seed Financing to Create Industry-Leading Pipeline of Allosteric Phosphatase Modulators

Seed round was led by M Ventures and INKEF Capital, and co-led by Taiho Ventures and Bioqube Ventures

Leiden, The Netherlands, April 22, 2021 – Anavo Therapeutics, a global leader in unlocking the full therapeutic potential of human phosphatase biology, debuted today with a EUR 20 million (approx. $24 million) seed financing. Anavo’s mission is to pioneer systematic drug discovery and development approaches aimed at phosphatases, a rich and largely untapped therapeutic target class. The funds will be used to advance a proprietary drug discovery portfolio in oncology and establish a versatile and robust platform to address the target space broadly across multiple indications. Anavo’s leadership team, Dr. Birgit Zech and Dr. Gerhard Müller, are building on several years of joint experience in the biopharmaceutical industry and have demonstrated the ability to navigate rapidly emerging sectors in biopharma most recently as co-founders of Gotham Therapeutics. The founding team is further complemented by Claus Schalper, a renowned finance expert and serial biotech entrepreneur.

Phosphatases and kinases regulate the activity of numerous crucial signaling pathways by removing or adding a phosphate group from proteins or other biomolecules. Imbalances in this process can lead to a multitude of diseases. While kinases have been exploited by drug developers worldwide, phosphatases stayed largely untouched after setbacks earlier in this century.

Anavo’s approach focuses on combining profound understanding of phosphatase biology with deep drug discovery expertise and state-of-the-art technologies to design first-in-class and best-in-class small molecule modulators of phosphatase activity. The company has attracted world-leading phosphatase biology expertise to its advisory board in Mathieu Bollen, Professor of Molecular Cell Biology at University of Leuven, and Nicholas Tonks, Professor of Cancer Research at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. Taken together, both have authored and co-authored more than 500 scientific publications on phosphatases and related physiological processes.

“Anavo was founded to unlock the full potential of phosphatase-targeting allosteric modulators and has attracted one of the largest European biotech seed rounds to date. Recent progress especially around SHP2 has demonstrated that the time is ripe to address phosphatase drug discovery more systematically and on a much larger scale,” said Dr. Birgit Zech, Chief Executive Officer of Anavo Therapeutics. “With Mathieu Bollen and Nicholas Tonks as our initial scientific advisory board members, we have attracted two world-leading scientists in phosphatase biology which complements our deep drug discovery know-how.”
“Academic research on the human phosphatome has moved way ahead of the industry and we are now sitting on a real treasure trove of potential therapeutic avenues to explore, targets to validate, and programs worth translating into preclinical and clinical evaluation,” said Dr. Gerhard Müller, Chief Scientific Officer of Anavo Therapeutics. “Among all target classes currently defined as ‘undruggable’, we expect phosphatases to have the deepest and most profound impact on clinical outcomes once addressed in a systematic and coherent fashion.”

Therese Liechtenstein, Principal at M Ventures, added: “Anavo’s novel approach and its experienced management team provide us with the best tools and key ingredients to address challenges in phosphatase drug discovery, and unlock this rich target class. We are excited to be part of Anavo and their mission.”

Simone Botti, Junior Partner at INKEF Capital, added: “The progress that has been made with SHP2 in our industry has revived the phosphatase sector but is only scratching the surface of this largely untapped attractive molecular target class. We are very pleased to support Anavo, a company poised to deliver first-in-class therapeutics in oncology and establish itself as a world leader in phosphatase drug discovery.”

Therese Liechtenstein and Simone Botti will be joined by Sakae Asanuma, President and CEO of Taiho Ventures, and Debora Dumont, Managing Partner at Bioqube Ventures, on Anavo’s Board of Directors.

**About Anavo Therapeutics:**
Anavo Therapeutics is the first company to systematically drug phosphatases, a rich target space previously considered undruggable for decades. We have attracted world-leading scientific expertise in phosphatase-driven disease biology and drug discovery to unlock the full potential of phosphatase-targeted allosteric modulators. In oncology, Anavo is developing multiple first-in-class therapeutic programs and will build on partnerships around its platform to establish a rich pipeline across several indications. Anavo is backed by blue-chip investors M Ventures, INKEF Capital, Taiho Ventures and Bioqube Ventures. For more information, please visit: [www.anavotx.com](http://www.anavotx.com)

**About M Ventures:**
M Ventures is the strategic, corporate venture capital arm of Merck. Its mandate is to invest in innovative technologies and products with the potential to significantly impact the company’s core business areas. From its headquarters in Amsterdam and offices in the US and Israel, M Ventures invests globally in transformational ideas driven by great entrepreneurs. M Ventures takes an active role in its portfolio companies and teams up with entrepreneurs and co-investors to translate innovation towards commercial success. M Ventures has a significant focus on early stage investing and company creation including the creation of spin-offs to leverage the company’s science and technology base. For more information, visit [www.m-ventures.com](http://www.m-ventures.com).
About INKEF Capital:
INKEF Capital is a venture capital firm based in Amsterdam, backing promising early-stage companies in Europe. INKEF takes pride in being a patient, long-term investor with the ability to support companies through several rounds of funding. From the early stages of a technology or life science venture, INKEF Capital supports entrepreneurs building their ideas into successful international businesses. For more information, please visit: https://www.inkefcapital.com/

About Taiho Ventures:
Taiho Ventures, LLC is the corporate venture arm of Taiho Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd., a Japanese specialty pharmaceutical company focusing on oncology, allergy and immunology, and urology. With $300M under management, Taiho Ventures is actively investing in early-stage private companies strategically relevant to Taiho Pharmaceutical. The firm considers company creation, spinouts and the option-type of investments as well as pure equity investments. For more information, visit https://taihoventures.com/

About Bioqube Ventures:
Bioqube Ventures NV is a specialist life sciences investment firm with Managing Partners Debora Dumont, Dirk Reyn and Nico Vandervelpen. The firm was founded by Debora Dumont and Nico Vandervelpen in 2016 and has seen its team grow to 10 people over the past years. Bioqube Ventures’ team today consists of a mix of investment managers, sector experts and serial entrepreneurs that have a proven track record in successfully building and leading companies on their growth paths.

Leveraging on the team’s experience, Bioqube Ventures enables early-stage life sciences companies to maximize their full potential. Bioqube Ventures recognizes the value of industry guidance and has therefore set up strategic relationships with a selected number of industry partners with complementary skills.

Bioqube Ventures NV launched Bioqube Factory Fund I in May 2020 with a clear focus on therapeutics. Through a diversified investment strategy, including de-risking projects in a “Create” stage, the Fund will exclusively invest in the most promising innovative science in Europe and will put its expertise at work to ensure its portfolio flourishes. For more information, please visit: https://www.bioqubeventures.com/

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