BIOPHARMADIVE

DIVE BRIEF

Bristol Myers pays $100M for a different kind of ADC

A deal with Orum Therapeutics gives the large pharma access to an experimental blood and bone cancer drug that's ready to enter clinical testing.

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Reporter

James Palacino, head of research at Orum Therapeutics, and Joanne Lim, associate director of immunology, observe an experiment. *Permission granted by Orum Therapeutics*

Dive Brief:

- Bristol Myers Squibb is acquiring an antibody-drug conjugate to treat bone and blood cancers from multinational biotechnology startup Orum Therapeutics, the companies announced Monday.
- Under the terms of the deal, Bristol Myers will pay Orum $100 million for the program and commit to paying as much as $80 million more if certain milestones are met.
- Orum describes its therapy, dubbed ORM-6151, as an antibody-enabled protein degrader, merging the concept of an antibody-drug conjugate with the field of protein degradation. Orum said it has received Food and Drug Administration clearance to enter Phase 1 testing in acute myeloid leukemia and myelodysplastic syndromes.

Dive Insight:

Orum, which operates in Boston and Daejeon, South Korea, is developing a twist on antibody-drug conjugates, or ADCs. This class of medicines commonly link a targeting antibody to a tumor-killing toxin, guiding the potent drug to tumors while sparing healthy tissue. Rather than a toxin, Orum is using a small molecule designed to degrade target proteins.

The company announced plans to develop ORM-6151 in late 2022 as the second experimental drug of this type in its pipeline. It debuted preclinical data at the American Society of Hematology conference showing how the tumor-targeting medicine could be used to treat acute myeloid leukemia.

ORM-6151 is also being developed for high-risk myelodysplastic syndromes, in which immature blood cells in the bone marrow don't mature into healthy blood cells.

Orum's lead drug, called ORM-5029, is in a Phase 1 clinical trial and targets HER2-expressing solid tumors in patients with breast cancer. The company expects to complete the study in 2025, according to a federal database of clinical trials.

When the company started working on their approach, few startups were trying to combine protein degraders with ADCs, said Sung Joo Lee, Orum's CEO.

"When we started this effort, people didn't really recognize that value," Lee said. "But now, everybody's excited. Everybody wants to enter the space. So we're very proud that this deal has validated our approach."

Orum's financial advisers at Perella Weinberg Partners connected Lee with Bristol Myers, paving the way for the deal. "They're obviously the leader in the oncology and degrader space," Lee said.

Bristol Myers is one of several large drugmakers now investing ADCs in a major way. The commercial success of drugs such as AstraZeneca's Enhertu and Seagen's Adcetris has prompted a recent flurry of ADC-related dealmaking, including one last month between Merck and Co. and Daiichi Sankyo.

Analytics company Global Data estimates that pharma companies signed roughly $16 billion worth of antibody-drug conjugate licensing deals in 2022.

Targeted protein degradation is also an up-and-coming field, putting Orum at the center of two fast-moving areas of research. ADC pioneer Seagen is working with the biotech Nurix on a similar kind of hybrid therapy.

Editor's note: This story has been updated to clarify comments from Sung Joo Lee.