Companies work to bring antibody drug to China

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A group of Chinese executives and technical experts from a Beijing-based company are working with counterparts from a manufacturing facility in Texas to bring the antibody drug rituximab to China.  
The plant-derived rituximab is used to treat autoimmune diseases including certain types of rheumatoid arthritis.  
The therapeutic antibody is the first product focus of a jointly developed master agreement reached in July between Pharming Ltd and iBio Inc in Bryan, Texas. Executives from both companies began a four-day meeting on Tuesday to initiate the first stage of their business collaboration.  
Rituximab was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in 1997 and has been placed on the World Health Organization’s list of essential medicines, but it is still too expensive for many patients who could benefit from its use. IBio and CC-Pharming made the decision to work together with a goal of making the drug more affordable.  
“I believe that all people in developed countries need this technology,” said Wang Yueju, founder and chairman at CC-Pharming, at a news conference on Tuesday. “I believe this collaboration will benefit not only the Chinese people but the American people and people around the world.”  
Wang has more than 20 years of experience in the applied plant biotechnology field. He once led research teams at Northeastern State University using plant systems and cell culture to evaluate and produce therapeutic pharmaceuticals, vaccines and other products.  
In 2017, Wang left his tenured faculty position in the US to create CC-Pharming in Beijing, focusing on plant molecular medicine technology research and product development.  
CC-Pharming is paying iBio $4.7 million to be its China partner for joint development of products and manufacturing facilities for the Chinese biopharmaceutical market, utilizing iBio’s technology.  
According to the agreement, iBio will provide process development and manufacturing services at its Texas facility for initial product development and will assist CC-Pharming in facility design and manufacturing in China. CC-Pharming will manage all operations in China, with iBio participating through joint ownership of the China business and ongoing collaboration.  
“Our collaborative business agreement is mutually beneficial and expected to generate significant financial results for both companies — while also providing additional benefits to our communities,” said Robert Erwin, president of iBio.  
Barry Holtz, president at iBio CDMO, a subsidiary of IBio, said that this deal benefits both China and US.  
“We are certainly reaching out to countries that haven’t met medical needs, and they are reaching toward to us. It’s a good business relationship. It’s not disadvantaging anybody,” he said.

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