



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Wolf Administration Highlights Development of Promising New Drug Candidate to Treat COVID-19

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Deputy Secretary Steve D’Ettorre and Ben Franklin Technology Partners Innovation Works CEO Richard Lunak joined Teresa Whalen, CEO of Pittsburgh-based [CytoAgents](#), to highlight the development of a new COVID-19 treatment.

“This exciting new development was made possible by the strong partnerships the Wolf Administration has fostered with our Ben Franklin Technology Partners and the companies they support, like CytoAgents,” said Deputy Secretary D’Ettorre. “We know that the investments we make in these innovative companies today will pay dividends tomorrow, and the work that CytoAgents is doing, and the support they’re receiving from Innovation Works, will inspire hope and, quite literally, save countless lives.”

CytoAgents, a [Ben Franklin Technology Partners company](#), has begun its Phase 1 clinical trial for COVID-19 treatment. The leading drug candidate, GP1681, combats “cytokine storm,” clinically known as hypercytokinemia, a severe immune reaction.

“Innovation Works provides capital, expertise, and resources to highly promising startups in Southwest PA,” said Rich Lunak, president and CEO of Innovation Works. “But the real work comes from innovative companies like CytoAgents,” Lunak continued. “These startups are creating the technologies and innovations that will improve the nature of our society while building those successful companies here in Pennsylvania and adding to our dynamic economy.”

GP1681, a small molecule inhibitor of cytokine release, addresses an unmet need for therapeutic treatment. It has been shown to tamp down various cytokines and address the underlying cause of life-threatening symptoms associated with cytokine storm.

GP1681 will be an affordable, oral therapeutic and an important component of a multi-faceted treatment plan.

The Phase 1 Trial — a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study to assess the safety and tolerability of GP1681 in healthy adults — is being conducted in partnership with contract research organization, Novotech, and clinical trial unit, CMAX Clinical Research in Australia.

“The world has an urgent need for new COVID-19 treatments, in addition to testing and vaccines. Our clinical trial is designed to evaluate the use of GP1681 as a potential new, cost-effective, shelf-stable, oral drug to treat cytokine storm,” said [Teresa Whalen, RPh](#), CEO of

CytoAgents. “We are excited to report that the first cohort has just been successfully completed with positive results, enabling the second cohort to proceed immediately and start dosing this week. We are building a powerful treatment platform for respiratory illness that ultimately creates a lasting solution first for COVID-19 cytokine storm and then for a pipeline of indications.”

CytoAgents is a privately held biotechnology company focused on the development of innovative pharmaceutical products for the treatment of cytokine storm related to infectious disease, such as COVID-19 and influenza, as well as non-infectious indications, including CAR T-cell therapy and vaping-induced lung injury.

Innovation Works is a member of the Ben Franklin Technology Partners, one of the nation’s longest-running technology-based economic development programs. IW and its BFTP counterparts across the state focus on the entrepreneur and innovation as the ultimate engines of growth and deliver crucial resources to help drive that growth, including investing risk capital in emerging technology-based enterprises and established businesses; providing hands-on technical and business expertise to spur enterprise growth and accelerate commercialization activities; and delivering customized solutions that draw on an extensive network of public and private resources, including universities, federal laboratories and research institutions.

For the most up-to-date information on COVID-19, Pennsylvanians should follow www.governor.pa.gov and www.doh.pa.gov.

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