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Cancer drug shows promise

Brown Cancer Center held trials

By **Patrick Howington**

phowington@courier-journal.com

The Courier-Journal

A cancer drug discovered by scientists now at the University of Louisville and developed by former Louisville company Aptamera has shown promise in a human clinical trial.

The drug caused "major tumor shrinkage" in two of 12 kidney cancer patients, said British drug company Antisoma, which bought Aptamera last year in a stock deal valued at \$21.4 million.

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The drug, called AS1411, also halted tumor growth in some other patients, said Dr. Donald Miller, director of the James Graham Brown Cancer Center at U of L, where the trial was recently completed.

Miller was head of the scientific team that discovered AS1411. It binds to a particular protein on the surface of

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cancer cells, causing them to stop growing and die.

Patients with advanced cancers of various types took part in the trial, conducted in two phases between 2003 and this year. The second phase focused on the 12 kidney cancer patients and five lung-cancer patients.

The trial was designed only to show that AS1411 is safe. But the drug also had a dramatic effect on

some patients' tumors.

Two kidney patients' tumors decreased in size by 70 percent or more. One of the patients had four tumors and had tried three other drug regimens without such shrinkage, Antisoma said.

Several other patients saw the growth of their tumors halted for as long as 15 months, Antisoma has said.

Miller cautioned that larger trials must be held to confirm the drug's effectiveness and best dosage. The earliest that AS1411 could be approved for widespread use is in three or four years, he said.

"We are extremely optimistic, but very cautious" about predicting success, he said.

Miller's team discovered the drug while at the University of Alabama-Birmingham. He came to U of L in 1999 through the Bucks for Brains program, which pairs state and university funds to hire top researchers.

Two other scientists from the UAB team, Paula Bates and John Trent, also came to U of L. All were officers of Aptamera.

Miller will present data about the clinical trial Oct. 1 to the European Society of Medical Oncology.

Reporter Patrick Howington can be reached at (502) 582-4229.

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