

PRESS RELEASE

Aromics launches a ‘crowdfunding’ campaign to accelerate the development of a novel drug for the treatment of asbestos-related cancer

- The goal of the campaign launched by AROMICS, located at the Barcelona Science Park, is completing regulatory preclinical package of the first-in-human clinical studies of its drug NAX035 for the treatment of malignant mesothelioma, an aggressive, poor prognosis and highly treatment-resistant asbestos-associated malignancy, directly linked to asbestos exposure.
- Although the use of asbestos was banned in the EU back in 1999 (in Spain 2001), it is unlikely for us its see the real impact on the incidence of mesothelioma in Europe before 2020 due to its long latency period (30 to 40 years from exposure to diagnostics).
- The financial round of 300,000€ is oriented towards private investors who are interested in acquiring equity in the company through the European biotechnology crowdfunding platform CapitalCell who has recently been authorized as an alternative financial entity by the Catalan Government.

Barcelona, 16th December 2016. The biotech company [Aromics](#) located at the [Barcelona Science Park \(PCB\)](#) has launched an *equity crowdfunding campaign* through the European platform [CapitalCell](#), with the goal of raising a capital round up to 300,000€ for completing the preclinical package of its compound [NAX035](#), a novel first-in-class drug for the treatment of malignant mesothelioma, a rare, aggressive and highly treatment-resistant asbestos-associated malignancy.

Aromics' goal is to enter the compound into clinical trials Phase I/IIa right after raising this seed crowdfunding round. A *Complementary Diagnostic Tool* in liquid biopsy is being developed in parallel in order to stratify patients into a test and control group selecting those benefiting more from the therapy and to verify treatment efficacy. Once the proof-of-concept has been completed, Aromics foresees a license or co-development agreement with the pharmaceutical industry that will be in charge of completing the development and commercialization of the product. Contacts have already been initiated with several companies who have shown interest in the molecule developed by the *biotech*.

“Malignant mesothelioma is a lethal and aggressive disease with limited response to treatment. Current chemotherapy schedule approved for clinical practice includes the combination of surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Surgery is the most effective option, although a vast majority of patients are diagnosed in an advanced stage where it is not an option, being the treatment intention mostly palliative. Current chemotherapy has a low response rate (<50%), thus a high number of patients are not benefitting of current treatments. Novel and effective treatment strategies are urgently needed”, explains Dr. Carmen Plasencia, CEO and co-founder of Aromics.

A novel family of antitumor agents

The development of NAX035 is the most advanced project in Aromics' portfolio. It is the first lead compound of a novel family of anticancer drugs (*first-in-class*) that act by direct binding to messenger RNA, silencing the expression of overexpressed proteins in cancer. The compound has already shown its efficacy to reduce tumour size/growth when it is administered both orally and intraperitoneally, exhibiting a good toxicology and safety profile. In parallel, the *biotech* is working on getting the orphan designation for NAX035 that will signify an important advance for mesothelioma.

Scientific data that allow identifying NAX035 as potential drug for mesothelioma treatment were obtained during a collaborative the European Project [BERTA](#) of Aromics with the Italian medicinal chemistry company Naxospharma and Istituto Nazionale dei Tumori in Milano. “Our project is being supported by renowned members of the scientific community including Dr. Rafael Rosell who was featured in the prestigious journal *The Lancet* as European leader in the fight against lung cancer”, said Dr. Plasencia.

The antitumor compound is the effort of 4 years of work, with an investment close to 1.4 € million, financed by Aromics with the partial support of ACCIÓ in Catalonia (Eurotransbio program of the 7th EU Framework program) and the Centre for the Development of Industrial Technology (CDTI) in Spain.

Asbestos a human-recognized carcinogen

Malignant mesothelioma is an infrequent cancer arising in the lining cells (mesothelium) of the pleural and peritoneal cavities, as well as in the pericardium and the tunica vaginalis. Most prevalent is the pleural type (Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma) and its origin is directly linked to asbestos exposure, a group of fibrous minerals present in nature. Their long and resistant fibres do not conduct electricity and are highly resistant to heat, fire chemical substances and corrosion. Thus, it used to be widely used in an industrial setting.

Today, all forms of asbestos are considered human carcinogens causing important diseases such as asbestosis (pulmonary fibrosis) and cancer, including malignant mesothelioma (the asbestos hallmark cancer) as well as other lethal tumours like lung, larynx and ovarian cancer. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that asbestos exposure results in 107,000 deaths yearly (http://www.who.int/ipcs/assessment/public_health/asbestos/es/).

The use and commercialization of all asbestos types were limited some decades ago. The European Union [Directive 1999/77/CE](#) prohibited its use and any products containing this substance back in 1999. The deadline for its complete disposition was set for 1st January 2005. In December 2001, Spain banned the commercialization of chrysotile (white asbestos), the only type that was still in use ([BOE-A-2001-23636](#)). Asbestos is currently banned in [fifty countries](#), including the EU members. Nevertheless, the WHO estimates that about 125 million people in the world are exposed to asbestos at the labour place. Of those, around 8-10% are likely to eventually develop mesothelioma.

A silencing and latent public health threat

The burden of malignant mesothelioma is rising. Despite the prohibition of the use of asbestos, the major problem is the long latency period (40 years on average between the asbestos exposure and the disease onset), thus a peak of incidence is expected in Europe in around 2020 and beyond. The [European Economic and Social Committee \(EESC\)](#) estimates that more than 300,000 EU citizens will die of mesothelioma until 2030, considered as a critical point for asbestos-related malignancies.

Due to the long latency period and taking into account that mesothelioma shares similar symptomatology than other common diseases such as pneumonia, it is difficult to diagnose the tumor at an early stage, and symptoms remain unnoticed until later stages of the disease, where the tumor is less responsive to treatment.

“Remarkably, asbestos remains a serious threat: not only it is continuously used in more than 150 countries of the world (including emergent economies such as Russia, China, India, Brazil or Indonesia) but even in those countries like ours, where has been already prohibited, it remains still a challenge as there are still many buildings and industrial elements containing asbestos that require removal and disposal. A high cost removal plan that also puts workers and the community at immense risk. Therefore, asbestos still represent a serious unsolved labour, public health and environmental problem”, Carmen Plasencia emphasizes.

■ Invest in the project through: <http://capitalcell.net/investment/aromics23/>

■ About Aromics

Aromics (www.aromics.es), located at the Barcelona Science Park, is an *start-up* company based on the experience in the application of molecular biology techniques to cancer research of one of its founders, Dr. Carmen Plasencia, and with the aim of translating scientific advances into healthcare.

Over these years, the biotech that started its activity in 2006, has combined the development of its own products with an activity of services to third parties allowing the company to grow. The business model revolves around high

R&D activity (over 70% of current budget dedication) sustained by its technological capacity to develop rapid proof-of-concepts, strengthening strategic collaboration with other biotechnology companies for the co-development of novel products at international level and supplemented by services that contribute not only financially but also allowing the incorporation of novel technologies.

Aromics' pipeline includes projects at different stages of development that include novel indications for NAX035 such as lung, ovarian and colorectal cancer, novel antitumor compounds arising from the NAX platform for the treatment of Her2+ breast cancer (in collaboration with Aesis Therapeutics), novel anti-infective compounds based on Serine Protease Inhibitors (SERPINs, a group of proteins that are part of innate immune system involved in the host-defense in front bacteria and virus) and novel diagnostic tools in liquid biopsy.

Some of its current projects are supported by the Catalan Government, the most recent one belongs to the RIS3Cat Communities part of the FEDER Catalonia Operative Program 2014-2020, where Aromics collaborates with other biotech and pharma companies as well as hospital research centers in the generation of a drug accelerator for rare diseases.

Over the last 10 years, the company has mobilized over 5 € million from shareholder contributions, sales on preclinical services, and R&D funds from different agencies such as ACCIÓ, AGAUR, CDTI, ENISA, MINECO, ICEX and the European Union.

Aromics was the recipient of the seal of 'Innovative SME' from MINECO, as award of its sustained trajectory in research and development activities.

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