

# Informati on

Ascenion Information  
June 2014

## Financing and Acquisitions – Eventful Times for Start-ups

Three new companies were launched: one was immediately acquired by a listed company, and two were financed with the help of the Spinnovator. In addition, one of Ascenion's oldest and most successful portfolio companies was bought by a British pharma specialist.

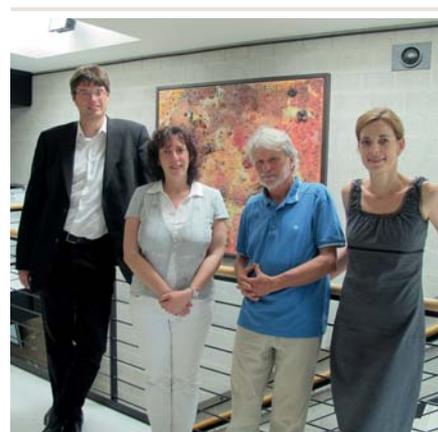
### amcure: Fighting metastases

This May, amcure, a spin-off of the Karlsruhe Institute for Technology (KIT), closed a Series A financing deal worth a total of EUR 5 million. Financing will be provided by a syndicate under the leadership of LBBW Venture Capital with participation from the KfW Bank and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The BMBF grant is provided in the form of project-specific funding via the Spinnovator. Ascenion's Spinnovator team has actively supported amcure's founders and will continue to assist with developing the project, together with experts from LBBW Venture Capital.

#### A peptide with triple impact

amcure will use the funding to further develop its product candidate AM001 for the treatment of cancer. AM001 is a peptide with exceptional potential that was investigated by Dr Orian-Rousseau and her team at KIT and that will now be developed further by the Chief Scientific Officer, Dr Alexandra Matzke. It binds specifically to a particular isoform of the surface molecule CD44, thereby interfering with central signal pathways that enable both the supply of blood to the tumour (angiogenesis) and the migration of cancer cells and their invasion of other organs (metastasis).

*In vivo* data show that AM001 not only stops the growth of primary tumours, but also prevents the development of metastases, and can induce the regression of metastases that have already developed. 'It would be an important breakthrough if these observations are confirmed in cancer patients,' says Dr Katja Rosenkranz, Senior Project Manager at the Spinnovator. 'Over 90% of cancer patients die from the metastases rather than from the primary tumour.'



amcure founders:  
left to right Dr Matthias Klafien, PD Dr Véronique  
Orian-Rousseau, Prof. Helmut Ponta, Dr Alexandra Matzke

## Focus on pancreatic cancer

AM001's target molecule, CD44v6, was discovered in the 1990s in Prof. Helmut Ponta's group. Increasingly of late, CD44 and its isoforms are considered to be important in the spread and development of metastases, and amcure is one of the first companies to take up this topic. CD44v6 plays an important role in many types of cancer, suggesting a broad area of application for this therapeutic approach – for example, in the treatment of pancreatic cancer, a particularly aggressive form of cancer that leads to death within 5 years of diagnosis in 95% of patients. According to a recent study published in the journal *Annals of Oncology*, it is also the only type of cancer with a rising mortality rate in the EU: in men as well as in women. 'Part of the problem is, that pancreatic cancer is often only discovered after metastases have developed,' explains Dr Matthias KlafTEN, CEO of amcure. 'As yet, there is no drug that can be used to effectively treat such late-stage cancer.'

## Next step: the clinic

In view of the urgent medical need, amcure's projects have received support from several quarters. Work to date was financed with the help of KIT and with funding from the Helmholtz Enterprise Fonds and EXIST-Forschungstransfer, a programme of the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (BMWi). The team is currently completing the preclinical data.

'The Spinnovator funding will allow us to reach the clinical stage,' says KlafTEN. The first study is due to start in about 2 years' time.

'Without the Spinnovator it wouldn't have been possible to raise sufficient financing in the current market environment,' he adds. 'We also thank Katja Rosenkranz and the team at Ascenion for their fantastic support. Together, we will do everything to ensure that our approach reaches clinical application.'

## Omeicos: Preventing stroke and heart attacks

Omeicos Therapeutics, a spin-off from the Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine Berlin-Buch (MDC), is the second company to obtain financing via the Spinnovator in the past few months. The team is developing a new synthetic agent that reduces atrial fibrillation, a common cardiac arrhythmia that is particularly problematic, as it significantly increases the risk of a stroke or heart attack. The company was introduced briefly in the previous issue of this newsletter.

[www.ascenion.de/en/news/ascenion-insight](http://www.ascenion.de/en/news/ascenion-insight) Issue December 2013

## Trianta and Medigene: T-cell therapies against cancer

Trianta Immunotherapies, a spin-off from the Helmholtz Zentrum München, was acquired by the listed company Medigene just one month after being founded. Furthermore, the entire Trianta team, under the leadership of Prof. Dolores Schendel, was taken on and Prof. Schendel herself was elected to the Medigene Executive Management Board.

This provides Medigene with an attractive development pipeline, and Trianta with additional resources and expertise for the development of their projects. While still at the Helmholtz Zentrum, the team established three ground-breaking technologies that specifically exploit the potential of T-cells (particularly potent immune defence cells) for therapeutic goals. 'T-cells are naturally the best weapons against cancer.

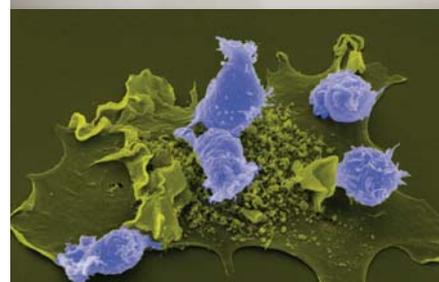
They are the only cells that are actually able to cure cancer,' says Prof. Schendel.

The lead product, a personalized therapeutic vaccine against cancer, is currently being evaluated in two clinical studies, Phase I/II and Phase II, respectively.

## Activaero and Vectura: Specialists in respiratory disease

The listed British company Vectura Group acquired Activaero GmbH in March of this year for a total consideration of EUR 130 million, thereby strategically extending its portfolio of technologies and products for the treatment of respiratory diseases. In 1998, Dr Gerhard Scheuch, then a scientist at the Helmholtz Zentrum München and later CEO of Activaero, founded his first spin-off company, Inamed GmbH, which changed its name to Activaero GmbH 7 years later. Today, the company has several products and technologies on the market, and further ones in development, including a patented inhalation technology (FAVORITE) that enables the targeted inhalation of respiratory drugs into predefined areas of the lungs. The approach is being investigated in seven clinical and a number of preclinical development programmes. Ascenion has accompanied Activaero from its foundation.

'Ascenion has been a helpful and reliable partner through all our ups and downs,' says Scheuch. He will continue to work in the executive management team of Vectura in his new role as CSO (Chief Scientific Officer), and is looking forward to the next phase of the company's history as part of the Vectura Group.



Ascenion's proceeds from the spin-off business – for example, from the sale of equity as the result of an acquisition – flow to the LifeScience Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Research.

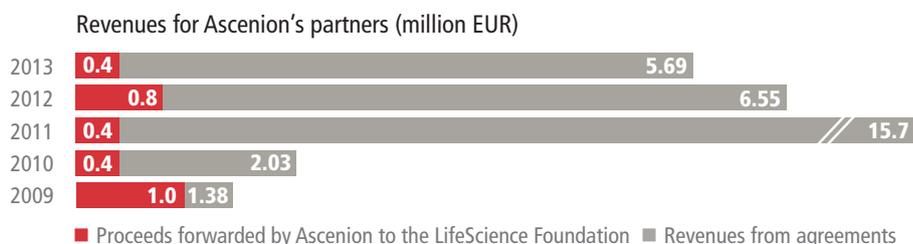
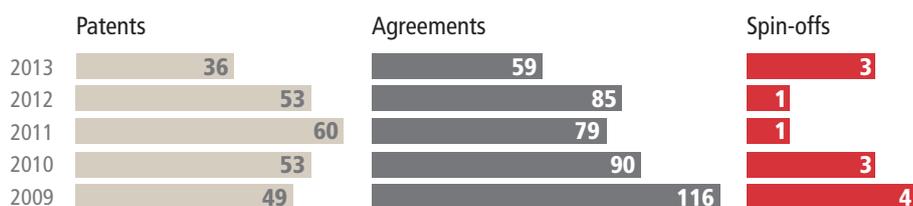
The foundation makes the funds available for research projects at the endowing institutes where the spin-offs originated.

## Ascenion in Figures: Review of 2013

A highlight for Ascenion in 2013 was the founding and successful financing of three spin-offs, despite the discouraging capital market situation. Ascenion has taken equity in these spin-offs, bringing the number of companies in which it now holds interests to 24. The income from licencing for Ascenion's partners and Ascenion's profits followed a sideways trend in 2013.

The prospects for 2014 are good.

Dr Christian Stein, CEO of Ascenion, expects a clear increase in revenue this year. At the same time, he questions whether financial success alone is the most appropriate measure of the value of technology transfer and its relevance in society. In the 1990s this was still the 'promise of salvation' with which the profession justified its existence: technology transfer – when done professionally – earns money for research institutes. Although there are indeed examples of considerably profitable technology transfer projects, it has become clear that this is not tenable in the overall picture. Among the leading nations in technology transfer worldwide, the focus of the debate has long since shifted: the goal is to transfer research results to applications for the benefit of the society in general, the economy and (in the life-science field) public health.



Christian Stein is quick to emphasize this: 'This is our goal. Nearly all technology transfer organizations, together with the research institutions we represent, have formulated their mission statements along these lines. This begs the question, why here in Germany the value of our work is still primarily measured according to our financial results. We urgently call on all those involved in research, politics and technology transfer to step in line with and implement the parameters that the EU are introducing for the measurement of technology transfer activities.'

[http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download\\_en/knowledge\\_transfer\\_web.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/knowledge_transfer_web.pdf)

## New Partners Around the World

Ascenion has gained several new partners over recent months – in Germany, Luxemburg and Japan. Life science is the common denominator. Universities, research institutes, even technology transfer offices, are specifically choosing Ascenion in order to obtain the expertise they require together with suitable industry contacts in this area.

'The projects contributed by our new partners enhance our Portfolio,' says Dr Susanne Letzelter, head of Corporate Development & Communication at Ascenion. 'Our projects on offer become more varied and interesting to industry – and we can simultaneously forge new contacts with decision makers and opinion leaders around the world, which also benefits our longstanding clients.'

Ascenion's new cooperation partners are:



### Centre de Recherche Public (CRP) – Gabriel Lippmann, Luxembourg

The CRP – Gabriel Lippmann is a public institute devoted to applied scientific research and technological development, as well as permanent technology transfer and high-level training. The institute focuses on three major axes, one of which is environmental and agro-biotechnology.



### Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin

The Charité is one of the largest university hospitals in Europe. With around 100 clinics and institutes located in 17 Charité centres, it is synonymous with the highest level of patient care and biomedical research. Great importance is attached to translational collaborations between basic molecular biology research and patient-oriented clinical practice.



### **German Centre for Cardiovascular Research (DZHK)**

The DZHK pulls together the research activities of 28 institutes at seven sites all over Germany. The prime goal is to make the results of new research available to all patients in Germany as quickly as possible, and to advance the treatment, diagnosis and prevention of cardiovascular disease.



### **Kobe University, Japan**

Kobe University is one of the oldest and most important universities in Japan. It has a prestigious medical faculty with an associated university clinic, an institute for animal model research and an international centre for medical research and treatment.



### **Universität zu Lübeck**

The Universität zu Lübeck is a life-science university. Its research and teaching activities started in the field of medicine. Today, interdisciplinary links between the natural sciences, computer sciences and medicine ensure not only practical, state-of-the-art training, but also medical care of the highest quality.

## **Networks**

### **Technology transfer meeting in South Africa**

In March of this year, experienced technology transfer experts from all over the world gathered together with the Board of the Alliance of Technology Transfer Professionals (ATTP) for workshops in Pretoria and Cape Town, South Africa, to compare experiences and discuss technology transfer instruments and trends. The workshops were organized by the South African technology transfer association Sarima. Particular highlights were the presentations by Jane Muir, President of the Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM), and Kevin Cullen, Vice president of the network Knowledge Commercialisation Australasia (KCA), and also a member of the AUTM Board of Directors.

Jane Muir gave an impressive account of how important effective branding and marketing is for technology transfer organizations, and all this entails: professional communication on a personal level, up-to-date websites and attractive and clearly formulated technology offers. A main topic of discussion was the frequently encountered discrepancy between marketing messages and mission statements. While the former usually extol financial successes, the latter emphasize the value of technology transfer to society as a whole. For many, the take-home message was the need to highlight, also in marketing activities, what they see as their primary task: to support the transfer of research results into meaningful applications.

Kevin Cullen's assertions ran along similar lines: technology transfer organizations are not 'foreign bodies' in the academic environment, but an integral element without which universities and research institutes could not fulfil their goals. According to Cullen, the goal of academic research and teaching is the accumulation and distribution of knowledge – and technology transfer is the logical extension of this by other means. Not all those present agreed with this view. Above all, younger technology transfer organizations (still) pursue economic success stories, not least due to the expectations of government and investors.



## **Noteworthy**

### **3rd BioFIT to take place 2-3 December 2014 in Lille, France**

BioFIT is an international partnering event which aims at stimulating and facilitating technology transfer in the life-sciences sector. Top leaders from the pharma and biotech industry, academics and practitioners in technology transfer, intellectual property and licensing will share best practices, know-how and maximize alliances. The program is organized around 3 main tracks and 12 sessions covering the future of public/private collaborations, dealmaking, financing and technology transfer issues. For further information and registration visit: [www.biofit-event.com](http://www.biofit-event.com)

## 8. Biotech NetWorkshop: Reinventing yourself



Schloss Ringberg on Lake Tegernsee was the setting in February for three inspiring days of talks, team events and discussions for budding and experienced life-science entrepreneurs – jointly hosted by Max Planck Innovation and Ascenion. 'The event relies on the enthusiastic involvement of our partners in industry and the investment community, who contribute their unvarnished views in a familiar atmosphere. The result is an exciting exchange from which all the participants benefit,' says Dr Michael Karle, Technology Manager at Ascenion. This year, the range of subjects chosen was deliberately broad: under the chairmanship of Prof. Horst Domdey, participants discussed alternative financing models with fund managers, business

angels and venture capitalists; senior executives from Sanofi-Aventis, Amgen and Qiagen presented their partnering and licensing strategies; experienced entrepreneurs shared their 'lessons learnt', and former Federal Minister Dr Heiner Geißler, spoke on the parallels between mountaineering and management. Not only these insights and ideas, but also the contacts forged make this a winning event for entrepreneurs-to-be. 'You can certainly learn from the experiences of others,' says Dr Hubert Müller of Ascenion. 'Nevertheless, each entrepreneur has to reinvent themselves in critical situations. And for this they need partners and advisors they can rely on.'

The next Biotech NetWorkshop takes place in early 2015. The dates and location will be announced shortly on the website. [www.biotech-networkshop.de](http://www.biotech-networkshop.de)

### BioVaria 2014: New impulses

Decision makers from the international biopharma and medtech industries looking for innovative projects joined leading scientists and technology transfer specialists from across Europe for BioVaria on 6 May 2014 in Munich. The most promising life-science innovations from 24 universities and research institutes in six European countries were presented in short talks

and posters. New partners, such as the IOCB TTO from Prague, Czech Republic, provided fresh impulses that were very well received by industry. 'There are many other extremely interesting technology transfer organizations in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in other European regions, that have so far not been properly appreciated. We hope to gain as many as possible of them as new partners for BioVaria 2015,' says Dr Christian Stein, CEO of Ascenion.

Save the date of the next BioVaria: 11 May 2015 in Munich. More information at [www.biovaria.org](http://www.biovaria.org)



## News in Brief

### Welcome to the team



Dr Gregor Lichtfuss  
Project Manager Spinnovator

Dr Gregor Lichtfuss joined Ascenion as Project Manager for the Spinnovator at the beginning of this year. Together with

his colleague Dr Katja Rosenkranz, and in consultation with the technology partners, he selects projects for inclusion in the Spinnovator programme and provides continuous support through the start-up founding process.

He previously completed his PhD in clinical immunology at the Burnet Institute for Medical Research and Public Health in Melbourne, and subsequently worked as

a consultant for the venture capital firm Brandon Capital Partners. Before moving to Australia, Gregor was project manager at the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin focusing on international counter-bioterrorism. He studied biology at the Humboldt University, Berlin and subsequently obtained an MSc in International Health in an Erasmus Mundus Program jointly run by several universities.

### Meet us

BIO International Convention, 23-26 June 2014, San Diego, US

ASTP-Proton Training Courses, 24-26 September 2014, Budapest, Hungary

LES 2014 Annual Meeting - IP, licensing & business development event, 5-8 October 2014, San Francisco, US

BIO-Europe 2014, 3-5 November 2014, Frankfurt, Germany

Falling Walls 2014, 8-9 November 2014, Berlin, Germany

ASTP Fall Meeting, 12-14 November 2014, Prague, Czech Republic

BioFIT 2014, 2-3 December 2014, Lille, France

BioVaria, 11 May 2015, Munich, Germany

## German Innovation Prize for iThera



In April, Ascension's portfolio company iThera Medical GmbH was announced winner of the German Innovation Prize in the start-up category for its MSOT (multispectral optoacoustic tomography)

technology. MSOT uses light to produce sound and then images: laser pulses directed onto cells or tissues generate acoustic signals that are picked up by a detector and converted into exact, three-dimensional images. In this way, living cells and tissues can be visualized without destroying them – in real time and with the highest precision – even when they are situated several centimetres beneath the body surface.

The technology was developed by Prof. Vasilis Ntziachristos and Dr Daniel Razansky at the Helmholtz Zentrum München with support from GO-Bio, a German Federal Ministry of Education and Research funding programme.



from left: Prof. Dr Vasilis Ntziachristos, Dr Philipp Bell, Dr Daniel Razansky, Dr Christian Wiest

## Technology Offers

- [TO 03-00341](#) KCNQ4 and KCNQ5 ion channels for the identification of selective channel function modulators
- [TO 21-00011](#) Innovative diagnostic agent for high resolution mapping of acute cerebral ischemia
- [TO 15-00297](#) Analysis for adult-onset Still's disease
- [TO 01-00888](#) iMATEs: local proliferation of CTLs and successful immunotherapy against chronic viral liver infection
- [TO 15-00325](#) Intramedullary locking in fracture treatment – new device
- [TO 29-00002](#) Polarization sensitive photo detector
- [TO 29-00003](#) Opto acoustic light modulator
- [TO 29-00005](#) High efficiency LED
- [TO 29-00004](#) Tunable AWG multiplexer
- [TO 29-00007](#) GaN nanowires on Ti-substrates
- [TO 29-00008](#) Strain adjusted manufacturing process for heterostructured nanowire LEDs
- [TO 32-00001](#) Topical vaccination

## MHH and Axolabs develop RNA diagnostic kit

Prof. Thomas Thum and his team at the Hannover Medical School (MHH) are cooperating with Axolabs GmbH to develop a kit for the simple and reliable diagnosis of acute kidney injury (AKI). The marker, a specific microRNA, originates from the MHH, and the simplified RNA diagnostic procedure from Axolabs, an oligonucleotide specialist that arose from Roche's Center of Excellence for RNA Therapeutics. The intensive cooperation between MHH and Axolabs has the goal of testing and validating a new detection method, with the subsequent development of a kit. Ascension negotiated the cooperation agreement for the MHH.

AKI, an abrupt loss of kidney function, results in the accumulation in the blood of substances that would otherwise be eliminated in the urine. AKI is nearly always reversible if recognized early enough. If untreated, however, it can be life threatening. Diagnosis normally relies on a number of parameters: blood and urine analysis together with ultrasound, X-ray or MRT examination of the kidneys. Prof. Thum and his colleagues have discovered a microRNA whose concentration is significantly raised in AKI. Detecting this microRNA could therefore support a specific diagnosis. Conventional methods of RNA detection are, however, relatively complex and time consuming: a rapid RNA diagnostic is required in order to make detection of the microRNA



feasible in the clinic. If the project proves successful, it could be the first of a whole series of cooperations. 'Prof. Thum and his team have identified numerous microRNAs associated with various diseases. For many of these illnesses, improved diagnosis would help support clinicians' therapy decisions,' comments Dr Ralf Cordes, Ascension's Technology Manager at the MHH.

## Editorial

This Information Letter is published periodically by Ascension GmbH.

Editor: Ascension GmbH,  
Herzogstr. 64, 80803 München, GERMANY  
Represented by: Dr Christian A. Stein (CEO)  
Register Court: Amtsgericht München  
HRB 118236  
VAT Identification Number:  
DE 812299325

Text: KONOCOM  
Layout: Design Direction  
Photos: Activaero, Amcure, Ascension, Axolabs, Charité (Bautsch), Helmholtz-Zentrum für Infektionsforschung, Max-Planck-Innovation, PT DLR/BMBF, Universität Kobe (Hasec), Universität zu Lübeck, WirtschaftsWoche, 123rf.com (pipopb, uatp2).

## Contact

**Munich:** T +49 89 318814-0  
info@ascension.de  
**Berlin:** T +49 30 948930-01  
berlin@ascension.de  
**Braunschweig:** T +49 531 6181-2090  
braunschweig@ascension.de  
**Hamburg:** T +49 40 22611-278  
hamburg@ascension.de  
**Hanover:** T +49 511 532-8921  
hannover@ascension.de  
**Neuherberg:** T +49 89 3187-2850  
neuherberg@ascension.de

[www.ascension.de](http://www.ascension.de)