



For immediate release

NEI Awards a Two-Year \$2.18 Million SBIR Grant to Aciont®

Salt Lake City, UT – December 8, 2009. The National Eye Institute (NEI), a division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), awarded a \$2.18 million grant to Aciont Inc. to help fund its development of a non-invasive, passive diffusion-based treatment for severe, non-infectious uveitis. Aciont's Visulex® treatment entails a proprietary combination of a topical formulation and a scleral lens-shaped eye application device that administers drug to eye within 5-10 minutes. Aciont completed work under the proof of concept phase of the grant with the support of research faculty at the University of Utah's departments of pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical chemistry and the John A. Moran Eye Center.

The PI of the project is William I. Higuchi, Aciont's founder and chief scientific officer. Important Moran Center advisors to the project are Nick Mamalis—a world renowned expert on intraocular lenses, postoperative inflammation and ocular pathology; and Albert T. Vitale—a vitreoretinal surgeon and world renowned authority in the diagnosis and treatment of uveitis and related ocular inflammation diseases.

"I think that this product has promise for the treatment of anterior, posterior and panuveitis patients," said Dr. Vitale. Uveitis refers to inflammation of the middle layer of the eye wall called the uvea. However, the term uveitis often refers to inflammation of any of the internal parts of the eye and it can affect the anterior, middle area and posterior sections of the eye globe. Uveitis is the third leading cause of blindness in the United States. Some estimate the number of uveitis patients in North America to be as high as 500,000. Vitale added, "The real utility will be the delivery of medication to the back of the eye for intermediate and posterior uveitis particularly that are complicated by macular edema."

Furthermore, Vitale concluded, "Certainly a transscleral delivery of drug would be preferable to intravitreal injection. This in my opinion has definitive potential." The NEI peer review council, which recommended the funding of Aciont's project, generally agrees with Vitale in principal. The council said that "the development of a non-invasive ocular drug delivery system allowing for a simple and quick application of medications for the treatment of uveitis" is "significant since it would allow treatment of this painful and potentially blinding disease in the doctor's office by a nurse or paraprofessional." The project described is supported by Award Number R44EY014772 from the National Eye Institute. The content of the grant is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Eye Institute or the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Balbir Brar, who had a significant role in the development of the grant application stated, "Acquiring this NIH grant is a great achievement and a major milestone for the Aciont team. Obtaining the NIH grant in a highly competitive environment essentially is an endorsement by peers in our field of research and industry." Bal Brar, D.V.M., Ph.D, is well known for his success as a drug/device developer; he is a former Vice President at Allergan[®], Inc. where he played a major role in the development of a number of high selling dermal and ophthalmic drugs such as Alphagan[®], Lumigan[®] for glaucoma, Restasis[®] for dry eye and a number of other drugs including Botox[®].

According to NIH's website (<http://report.nih.gov/recovery/arragrants.cfm>), Aciont is the only recipient of an SBIR award in the State of Utah funded by the NIH ARRA program in FY 2009. Also, the FY 2009 award to Aciont represents the largest funding amount to a Utah organization for any ARRA NIH project pertaining to the development of a pharmaceutical or therapeutic treatment of a disease. Aciont is eligible for applying for an extension to this project under NIH's competing renewal award program.

Aciont Inc. is a specialty biopharmaceutical company endeavoring to become the world leader in commercializing localized, non-invasive (topical passive diffusion-based and iontophoretic), controlled and sustained release back of the eye therapeutics for sight threatening diseases such as severe uveitis, diabetic macular edema and age-related macular degeneration. Aciont's goal is to provide ophthalmologists substantially greater freedom in treating and/or preventing chronic eye diseases through optimal drug dosing and improved patient/physician compliance. Aciont is located in Salt Lake City, Utah. For more information, visit the company's website at www.aciont.com.

Source: Aciont Inc.

Contact

John Higuchi, CEO
Aciont Inc.
(801) 359-3461
admin@aciont.com