

URSAPHARM Arzneimittel and CEBINA announce partnership to repurpose the antihistamine azelastine to combat COVID-19

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In the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a large number of pharmaceutical companies are looking for new approaches to combat the pandemic. In addition to vaccines, intensive research and development efforts around the world are focusing on identifying new anti-COVID therapeutics that includes re-evaluation of existing product portfolios with a view to repurpose drugs that have antiviral properties.

With this goal in mind, URSAPHARM Arzneimittel GmbH, based in Saarbrücken, and the Vienna-based biotech company CEBINA GmbH (Central European Biotech Incubator and Accelerator) are collaborating to repurpose the antihistamine drug azelastine hydrochloride as a potential anti-SARS-CoV-2 therapeutic. Azelastine has been successfully used for many years in anti-allergic therapy.

Starting with a novel computational drug repurposing prediction method, developed and performed by Prof Dr Robert Konrat (University of Vienna), CEBINA selected already approved active substances for experimental testing in collaboration with Prof Dr. Ferenc Jakab (Virology National Laboratory, Szentágothai-Research-Center, University of Pécs, Hungary). This collaborative effort led to the identification of azelastine as a potent antiviral compound effective against SARS-CoV-2, a finding confirmed by now by several independent research groups. The potent anti-SARS-CoV-2 activity of azelastine was demonstrated in a reconstituted human nasal tissue model and was evident at a lower dose than present in commercially available nasal sprays [1].

A clinical trial has started on February 16th 2021 to verify whether the use of a nasal spray preparation containing azelastine can achieve a reduction in viral load in the nasal cavity. The aim of the study is to show whether the anti-allergic medication Pollival® Nasal Spray, or a diluted version, can achieve a reduction in the viral load, therefore reducing transmission and positively influencing the course of the disease.

If positive results of the running clinical studies are demonstrated, URSAPHARM Arzneimittel GmbH and CEBINA GmbH believe this will be an important new approach to control viral spread and contain the current pandemic.

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About URSAPHARM Arzneimittel GmbH:

Since its foundation in 1974, URSAPHARM has developed into a globally operating group of companies. Numerous innovative products and patents secure the future of the company and offer over 700 highly qualified employees at the headquarters in Saarbrücken and in the sales countries excellent working conditions as well as promising future prospects. With its own

subsidiaries in France, Benelux, Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Portugal, Russia and India, as well as cooperation agreements with sales partners in more than 74 countries, URSAPHARM has developed into a global player over the past decades, which is now active far beyond its home borders. In the field of ophthalmology, URSAPHARM has been one of the market leaders in Germany and many European countries for years. URSAPHARM is also active in other indication fields like allergy: under the brand Pollival® the company distributes azelastine-containing nasal sprays and eye drops.

ABOUT CEBINA:

CEBINA GmbH – Central European Biotech Incubator and Accelerator (www.cebina.eu) is an Austrian-based company offering its in-house research, development, financing and management capabilities to early and medium stage biotech companies and actively identifies academic projects with product development potential with the aim of creating new companies. CEBINA is pursuing its own development projects, in particular in the infectious diseases area and has initiated multiple R&D projects to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Konrat, R., et al., The Anti-histamine Azelastine, Identified by Computational Drug Repurposing, Inhibits SARS-CoV-2 Infection in Reconstituted Human Nasal Tissue In Vitro. bioRxiv preprint doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.09.15.296228>.

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