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Affectis Pharmaceuticals AG Identifies Novel Gene Involved in Depression

Munich, Germany – Affectis Pharmaceuticals AG, a biopharmaceutical company developing novel drugs against depression and schizophrenia, announced today the identification of a gene strongly associated with bipolar affective disorders. The gene encodes for a receptor protein suggesting that it may constitute a promising target in bipolar disorders such as mania and depression. The company already has identified lead compounds, which it hopes to take into preclinical development later this year.

The gene was located on Chromosome 12 using pedigree analysis of a French-Canadian population, and the genomic region subsequently was identified using association studies with microsatellite markers in a case/control study from the same population. Detailed allelic, genotypic and family-based association studies suggest P2RX7 gene as being crucially involved in the onset of bipolar affective disorders.

"P2RX7 encodes for the P2X7 receptor, an ion channel that opens up on binding of extracellular ATP. Among others, P2X7 is expressed in the brain", said co-author Prof. Dr. Florian Holsboer, director of Max-Planck Institute for Psychiatry and Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Affectis Pharmaceuticals AG. "Its function is not fully described yet, but it is thought to be involved in neuroprotection and the modulation of inflammatory processes. We also have identified a particular polymorphism at an amino acid located in the C-terminal domain of the P2X7 receptor known to be essential for normal functioning of the receptor such as calcium transport, intracellular signalling etc."

Dr. Herbert Stadler, CEO of Affectis Pharmaceuticals AG added: "We have already filed for patents on the gene in the U.S. and in Europe and already started drug discovery one and a half years ago. We hope to pick a candidate targeting P2X7 soon so that we can start preclinical development. If all goes well, we might be able to move it into the clinic in 2008."

The research was published in this month's American Journal of Medical Genetics (Part B: Neuropsychiatric Genetics). The study was conducted in collaboration with Max-Planck Institute of Psychiatry (Munich, Germany), CHUL Research Center and Université Laval (Quebec, Canada) and Complexe Hospitalier de la Sagamie (Quebec, Canada).