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Cambridge vCJD technology close to UK roll-out

News - Life Sciences

Written by [Ben Fountain](#)

Tuesday, 24 November 2009 11:47

Cambridge technology that stops variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) being transmitted through blood transfusions could be in use across the UK early next year following an important endorsement.

[ProMetic BioSciences Ltd](#) (PBL), which is based at Cambridge Science Park, has developed the P-Capt prion reduction filter, which cleans blood prior to use by removing the prion responsible for vCJD.

PBL is a subsidiary of Quebec-headquartered ProMetic Life Sciences.

The technology has received the green light from the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO), an independent committee that advises the UK Department of Health - which has recommended the adoption of the P-Capt prion reduction filter to pre-treat red blood cells destined for children born since 1 January 1996.

Despite receiving CE mark approval as long ago as September 2006 and conducting two successful clinical trials of its own, the SaBTO recommendation is subject to the completion of the PRISM study, a multi-centre clinical trial initiated in 2007 to evaluate the safety of the technology. The 540 patient study is scheduled to conclude early next year.

According to PBL CEO, Dr Steve Burton, an NHS-wide adoption of the technology is then dependent on a commitment from the Department of Health to fund the roll-out of the technology. The total cost of introducing P-Capt is estimated to be between £60m and £75m.

Burton said that although a successful launch of the technology in the UK would not lead to an immediate increase in headcount at PBL's Cambridge R&D base, its longer-term prospects would be "significantly enhanced." 30 are currently employed at the facility.

It is anticipated that the company's manufacturing operations will see the bulk of any near-term growth.

"This announcement from SaBTO is important in itself, but may drive demand in other European countries that have experienced cases of vCJD. Countries like France, Spain and Portugal are looking to the UK as a barometer on this issue."

Iwona Walicka, project manager at MacoPharma, which manufactures and distributes the filter said: "1.8 million blood units are donated in England each year and yet we have no idea how many blood donors are incubating the vCJD prion, which can lie dormant for decades. What we do know for sure is that vCJD is a devastating disease for which there is no cure and that it can be transmitted by transfusion of infected blood/blood products."

Contaminated blood or blood products are recognised to pose the greatest transmission risk for



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vCJD, with five confirmed cases of such transmission in the UK.

Since 1996 there have been 170 cases of vCJD in the UK of whom 166 have died. It is estimated that the number of people incubating vCJD in the general population is anywhere between 1 in 4,000 and 1 in 20,000.

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