



STARPHARMA GEL STUDY DEMONSTRATES POTENTIAL INHIBITION OF HIV

Melbourne (Australia), 19 March 2003: Starpharma Pooled Development Limited (ASX: SPL) ("Starpharma") announced today that its lead product in development, a topical gel designed to prevent transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), has been shown to protect macaques against a virus equivalent to HIV in humans.

In studies headed by Dr Che-Chung Tsai of the University of Washington (Seattle, USA), a single intravaginal application of the gel containing 5% SPL7013 completely prevented the macaques from being infected by a single challenge of a humanised strain of simian immunodeficiency virus (SHIV) after intravaginal exposure. In contrast, three quarters of the animals receiving the placebo gel, and all animals receiving no gel, were infected with the virus. The single application of gel caused no adverse effects in any animal.

Starpharma's topical gel contains SPL7013, an antiviral dendrimer compound. The gel is designed to be applied intravaginally by women prior to sexual intercourse. The positive results of this study are an important milestone in advancing a microbicide towards use in humans.

Starpharma previously reported the protective properties of the active component of the gel, SPL7013, against genital herpes and Chlamydia infection. However, due to the social impact of the virus around the world, prevention of HIV infection in humans is the most important outcome of microbicide use.

Following the encouraging activity that SPL7013 displayed against various strains of HIV in cell-based assays, the water based topical gel containing SPL7013 was selected to enter studies in a monkey model for the prevention of HIV infection. These important studies were funded through a contract by the Division of AIDS (DAIDS), the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the U.S. Department of Human and Health Services (DHHS).

Full details of the current study will be presented today at the Topical Microbicides Development and Evaluation Workshop in Washington DC in the US. This meeting is organised by NIAID, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the Office of AIDS Research of the NIH, DHHS and brings together microbicide researchers and developers to discuss recent developments in the field.

Studies are continuing with NIH support to further evaluate the protective effects of gels containing lower levels of SPL7013. In addition, macaque vaginal safety studies are on-going under NIH contract to assess the repeat dose safety of the gels containing increasing amounts of SPL7013.

Vaginal microbicides are increasingly being recognized internationally as a key strategy in controlling the spread of the HIV and STD epidemics. At the end of 2002, 42 million people were living with AIDS of which 19.2 million were women (www.unaids.org). If new prevention strategies such as a microbicide are not introduced, it is estimated that at least an additional 45 million people will become infected with HIV by 2010.

CONTACTS:

Dr John Raff
Chief Executive Officer
+61 3 8532 2701
www.starpharma.com

Mr Ben Rogers
Company Secretary
+61 3 8532 2702