QLT PhotoTherapeutics Inc.

News Release

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INNOVATIVE TREATMENT FOR AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE SHOWS PROMISE IN RESULTS FROM PIONEERING NEW STUDY

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NANTES, France—The world's first clinical study using photodynamic therapy as a treatment for autoimmune disease—which afflicts an estimated 5% of adults in North America and Europe—concluded that the treatment was safe, well tolerated and showed potential for efficacy, delegates at a conference in Nantes heard today.

In a presentation to the Seventh Biennial Congress of the International Photodynamic Association, Dr. Harvey Lui of the University of British Columbia said a Phase I study of photodynamic therapy with verteporfin (also known as BPD-MA) as a treatment for psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis prompted no serious adverse events, with some patients showing a significant decrease in total PASI (Psoriasis Area and Severity Index) score by the end of the nine-week trial.

Verteporfin is a light-activated drug developed by Vancouver, B.C.-based QLT PhotoTherapeutics Inc., the trial's sponsor and the world leader in the emerging field of photodynamic therapy.

"We're encouraged by these positive findings and believe more than ever that photodynamic therapy could play a role as a viable alternative treatment to conventional autoimmune disease therapies, which are typically lengthy, potentially cancer causing, and often cause substantial acute and long-term side effects, including liver and renal toxicity," said Dr. Lui.

Dr. Lui led the three-person medical team that conducted the nineteen-patient trial at the University of British Columbia, Division of Dermatology and Vancouver Hospital and Health Sciences Center. Dr. Lui's collaborators in the study were Dr. Robert Bissonnette and Dr. David McLean.

Although the primary purpose of the trial was to establish the safety of verteporfin and photodynamic therapy in treating psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, lesions showed substantive change at the cellular level following the treatment process, with a significant reduction in key immunologic markers and epidermal thickness in skin biopsy samples. "The data confirms that the treatment was overall beneficial, and in the case of two individuals, it was profoundly positive," said Dr. Lui.

In Dr. Lui's study, eight of the nineteen patients treated reported no adverse events. Four others reported mild to moderate pruritis—or itching of their skin lesions, a common psoriasis symptom—following treatments. Any other adverse events were of mild to moderate intensity, and were resolved before the study ended, he said.

The trial procedure required patients with active psoriasis and associated psoriatic arthritis to be phototested with UVA light to establish the minimal erythematous dose (MED), or the lowest UVA dose needed to produce a reddening of the skin. Each patient then received a series of four weekly doses of intravenously administered verteporfin, followed by exposure to increasingly higher levels of half-body or whole-body UVA in a convential light box. Doses started at 20% of MED in week one, rising to 80% of MED in week four.

In summary, the study showed that photodynamic therapy with verteporfin is safe and well tolerated, with some evidence of systemic improvement in patients' overall health, lower psoriasis activity levels, and decreased pain in arthritic joints.

As part of its aggressive clinical trial program in the autoimmune area, QLT plans a Phase II trial in 1999 to treat psoriasis, utilizing blue fluorescent light to sidestep the potentially cancer-causing attributes of UVA (ultra-violet) light. Results from QLT's Phase I trial of rheumatoid arthritis, which is now underway, are also expected in early 1999.

QLT's approach to treating autoimmune disorders differs from that used in cancer in that the target cells—the activated cells of the immune system—are down-regulated instead of destroyed as is the case with tumor cells.

QLT PhotoTherapeutics Inc. is the world leader in the development and commercialization of proprietary pharmaceutical products for use in photodynamic therapy. QLT's innovative science has advanced photodynamic therapy beyond applications in cancer towards potential breakthrough treatments in ophthalmology, autoimmune disorders and cardiovascular disease.

QLT's portfolio of products include PHOTOFRIN® (porfimer sodium), the world's only approved photodynamic therapy drug, used in the treatment of various cancers throughout North America, Japan and Europe; and verteporfin (BPD-MA), a therapy in final stages of testing to treat age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in adults over the age of fifty.

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QLT PhotoTherapeutics Inc. is listed on The Nasdaq Stock Market under the trading symbol “QLTIF” and on The Toronto Stock Exchange under the trading symbol “QLT”.

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