

EU raids in antitrust probe

The European Commission announced on 06 October 2009 that it had raided several pharma firms over suspected violations of EU antitrust regulations. EC spokesman Jonathan Todd said he could confirm “that the Commission started surprise inspections at several pharmaceutical companies”, but the EC did not name the companies targeted or relate which countries were involved.

The EC stated that it was seeking evidence of “restrictive business practices and/or the abuse of a dominant market position”. Sanofi-aventis confirmed it had been raided and said the company was cooperating with EU antitrust regulators. In addition, Teva indicated that its offices in Paris had been visited, and the drugmaker reportedly said the raid was part of a broader antitrust probe of generic practices in France.

In July 2009, the EC warned that it would turn the spotlight on individual drugs companies after it published a report claiming that generic drugs were being delayed and costs to consumers increased unnecessarily.

The commission found that delays cost EU citizens 20% in extra spending. Pharmaceutical companies were accused of deploying a variety of delaying tactics to protect patents, and in some cases, reaching restrictive settlement agreements out of court.

www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/pharma-competition.ty

At this year’s American Diabetes Association (ADA) scientific session 6–10 June 2009 in San Francisco, California, USA, Medtronic Diabetes unveiled its new M-Powered car, equipped with a system that wirelessly incorporates a patient’s continuous glucose monitor with a dashboard to make driving safer for those who can go from 120 mg/dL to 60 mg/dL within a matter of seconds.

The M-Powered car would allow a person with a continuous glucose monitor to receive readings of their blood sugar through both audio and visual cues from the car’s dashboard.

A company spokesman explained: “Although we don’t plan to commercialise the automotive application immediately, we are exploring ways to link our therapy to other products such as mobile phones, bedside monitors and hand-held devices in the next 18 months to 24 months.”

www.medtronic.com/Newsroom

Sutent promising in pancreatic islet cell tumours

Phase III data from a multinational trial have shown that Sutent (sunitinib), Pfizer’s multi-targeted tyrosine kinase inhibitor, significantly improves progression-free survival (PFS) when compared to placebo, in patients with well-differentiated pancreatic islet cell tumours. The trial was stopped early in view of the significant PFS in the sunitinib cohort.

Eric Raymond, Professor of Medical Oncology in Clichy, France, presenting these findings at the joint ECCO 15–34 ESMO Congress, Berlin, Germany, said: “In patients with pancreatic islet cell tumours for whom surgery is impossible, treatment options are limited. However, because these tumours have well-developed vasculature and express several angiogenic proteins, the use of targeted anti-angiogenic agents has potential.” Compared to placebo, sunitinib evoked a significant improvement in median PFS (11.1 months vs. 5.5 months) and displayed a manageable safety profile.

Professor Raymond concluded: “These data support the clinical safety and efficacy of sunitinib in patients with unresectable, advanced or metastatic pancreatic islet cell tumours.”

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Abbott to acquire Solvay’s drug unit

Abbott announced on 28 September 2009 an agreement to acquire Solvay’s pharmaceuticals business for Euros 4.5 billion in cash. The acquisition includes full global rights to the cholesterol treatments TriCor (fenofibrate) and TriLipix (fenofibric acid). The transaction also includes payments of up to Euros 300 million if certain sales milestones are met between 2011 and 2013. The deal diversifies Abbott’s pharmaceutical products, expanding international growth platform and establishes Abbott’s presence in the growing global vaccines market.

Belgium-based Solvay Pharmaceuticals will add more than US\$3 billion (Euros 2.05 billion) in annual sales, the majority outside the US. Solvay has significant presence and infrastructure in key high-growth emerging markets, including Eastern Europe and Asia. Emerging markets are growing faster and increasing in importance due to demographics, rising incomes and expanded treatment of chronic disease.

The acquisition will also add approximately US\$500 million (Euros 342 million) to Abbott’s annual pharmaceutical R & D investment, providing Abbott with the opportunity to further accelerate near and long-term pharmaceutical growth.

www.abbott.com/global, press release