

PROVENCE PROMOTION

Pharmaxon tell us...

Rack one's brains !

Another grossly exaggerated "truth" that might do more than the famous sardine that blocked the Port of Marseilles! Marseilles is now one of the three French leaders in research in neurosciences... The Pharmaxon research centre is a symbol of this successful cluster, and originates from the Marseilles Institute of Development Biology (IDBM) and is increasing the number of initiatives in the fight against neurological diseases and accidents.

Dr. Deschaseaux, its Manager, reconsiders the success of this "made in Marseilles" company that enjoys many advantages including Provence Promotion's active networking.

> Neurology in high-tech mode

Dr Pascal Deschaseaux : Médecin avec un MBA de l'ESSEC (Paris), j'ai exercé cinq années en milieu hospitalier, 13 ans dans l'industrie pharmaceutique dans des fonctions internationales et un an et demi comme consultant pour des porteurs de projets de création dans le domaine des sciences de la vie. C'est alors que j'ai accepté de participer au projet passionnant du Dr Jean-Christien Norreel, docteur en neurosciences et chercheur post-doctoral au sein de l'IDBM. Ce scientifique, à l'esprit entrepreneur, cherchait un dirigeant pour la société Pharmaxon qu'il était en train de créer avec le Dr Geneviève Rougon, Directrice de l'Institut de Biologie du Développement de Marseille (IDBM) et Présidente de la Société Française de Neurosciences.

La société fondée en septembre 2004 est donc un essaimage de l'IDBM, institut de recherche de réputation internationale situé à Marseille sur le campus de Luminy.

> Searching for the "proof of clinical concept"

Pharmaxon is developing innovative compounds that encourage or inhibit cellular movements, particularly migration and growth of nervous cells so as to treat degenerative diseases and trauma to the nervous system. These are pathologies for which there are very important unsatisfied medical needs. These properties can also lead to interesting applications in the treatment of some cancers with a high metastatic capability, particularly glioblastoma, a brain tumour.

We are now carrying out three development programs and we would like to continue them until "proof of clinical concept" (end of so-called phase II clinical studies) and then license our products to international pharmaceutical laboratories. Since about 60% by value of the pharmaceutical market is now American, there is no doubt that a large part of our activity will be towards America.

> Funds for fundamental research !

At the moment, we are mainly informing investors and we will soon participate in specialized international meetings so as to develop the way we are perceived in other countries.

Obviously, we are searching for capital, firstly to chemically optimise our leader compounds, and then to carry out regulatory pre-clinical studies on these products. The total amount of funds necessary to bring our first compounds to the clinical phase will be of the order of 5 million euros.

Our initial capital was 40 000 €, and we have also received subsidies from the Ministry of Research and Innovation (45 000 €) and the reimbursable advance from Impulse, and the PACA-East incubator (about 30 000 €).

Furthermore, our screening platform (neurology research technique) is being set up using European funds. We have also been contacted for our expertise in this domain and will shortly start an in vivo test program for a leading American pharmaceutical laboratory within the framework of a research contract.

> In Marseilles: ideal environment and genuine will

We decided to set up in Marseilles, because apart from the fact that it is where we founded our company, the city is one of the three leading French neurosciences clusters. The city is home to important university skills, it includes many companies working in this sector thus forming a favourable environment and a strong potential for the future.

Moreover, and essentially, there is a real commitment by institutions, including scientific institutions such as the CNRS (National Scientific Research Centre) and the University of the Mediterranean, to provide assistance (Impulse, Bioméditerranée), political bodies in the broad sense (General Council, Regional Council) and financial institutions with regional investors specialized in "start up". Provence Promotion is another essential asset for us in terms of networking, contacts, with excellent skills and particularly are very good at welcoming, listening and reactivity. We are already included among Provence Promotion experts for the development of biotechnologies.

By experience, I can tell you that in our field, I do not know anywhere else in France with such excellent skills, care and perception combined. We do have a genuine potential in the PACA region, we are genuinely assisted and everyone is pulling in the same direction. This is essential for an ambitious biotechnology company like ours.



Pascal Deschaseaux (far left) shaking hands with Christian Poncelet, Chairman of the Senate (far right). Accompanied by Jean-Christien Norreel (second from the left), Pharmaxon Operations Manager, and Bouches-du-Rhône senator Jean-François Picheral (second from the right). Photo taken at the Senate at the time of the Tremplin Entreprises 2004, at which Pharmaxon was one of the national prizewinners.

More about Pharmaxon's activity

Specifically, Pharmaxon is developing "candidate drugs" that modulate the activity of several families of molecules called "bond molecules". These are involved in cell migration. Its objective is to increase, or otherwise to reduce, cell mobility; therefore, they form a sort of "glue" or conversely a "lubricant" for cells. Axon growth (the axon is the elongated part of nerve cells that transports the nervous influx to its target) is another required effect.

Current research programs apply to future treatment for lesions of the spinal cord and for memory problems, including Alzheimer disease. Results on motor function and memory already obtained in animals with two of our developed compounds are very promising. Eight persons (management and research workers) are now working on projects with a 2009 forecast of 22 employees.