

BIOVELOCITA, THE ITALIAN BIOTECH ACCELERATOR: TWO FRONTIER RESEARCH PROJECTS INTO DIABETES, TUMOURS AND AGEING GET UNDERWAY

A year after its launch, BiovelocITA announces two major partnership projects with leading Italian scientists engaged in research into diabetes at the San Raffaele Hospital and in oncology research at the IFOM in Milan respectively. Scouting for other innovative projects continues, expanding the horizons of the life sciences.

Milan, 23 November 2016 – Turning scientific discoveries into research projects with industrial value and facilitating their transformation process into start-ups: this is the mission with which **BiovelocITA S.r.L.**, the first Italian accelerator dedicated to biotech companies, was founded a year ago by **Silvano Spinelli, Gabriella Camboni** and **Sofinnova Partners**, leading international Venture Capital company in the life sciences industry.

BiovelocITA has so far raised more than **€7 million** from its founders and from other Italian investors. **Today, the company is announcing two major partnerships with leading Italian scientists, opening up extraordinary new frontiers in the fight against diabetes, in oncology and in certain age-related diseases.**

Enthera, a new start-up in the fight against diabetes

BiovelocITA, together with the originators, has founded **Enthera S.r.L.**, a new all-Italian biotech company that will be transforming the results of a major scientific study conducted by the team led by **Professor Paolo Fiorina**, doctor and researcher at Milan's San Raffaele Hospital and the Boston Children's Hospital of Harvard Medical School into medical treatment. The study initially led to the discovery of a new role for the IGFBP3 hormone which, produced by the liver, binds to the stem cells present on the surface of the intestine through a specific receptor. In people with diabetes, this hormone is produced in excessive amounts, leading to the destruction of the stem cells of the intestine, damaging the integrity of the intestinal mucosa. The role of IGFBP3 in the onset of *diabetic enteropathy*, an intestinal disorder that affects about 80% of people with diabetes mellitus, has therefore been recognised.

Enthera will obtain an exclusive worldwide licence from the San Raffaele Hospital, owner of the intellectual property. Over 18 months, around €1.5 million will be invested in research, mainly conducted at the San Raffaele Hospital. The objective of the Enthera development plan is to validate the role played by the IGFBP3 in intestinal disorders and the onset of diabetes and other chronic complications of diabetes itself. This could lead to a significant expansion of clinical recommendations and would open the way to revolutionary medical treatment for diabetes and its complications.

The new start-up Enthera, whose name comes from the crasis of the terms *entero* (referring to the intestine) and therapy, is a subsidiary of BiovelocITA, also owned by Professor Fiorina and his team.

*“Diabetes is a devastating chronic disease: it affects about 10% of the population of Western countries and over 20% of the population of some countries in the developing world. Fighting it is one of the priorities of medical science. The finish line, today, no longer seems unreachable – emphasises Professor **Paolo Fiorina** – “Our initiative with Enthera, thanks to the industrial expertise of BiovelocITA, has the potential to transform our discovery into a major drug in the treatment of diabetes and its clinical complications.”*

Lookout mechanisms for DNA stability: experimental research in oncology

The project stems from a discovery made at IFOM (the FIRC Institute of Molecular Oncology) in the laboratory of Dr **Fabrizio d'Adda di Fagagna**, at the international forefront in the study of signalling and DNA damage repair mechanisms. As is widely known, cell DNA is often damaged by multiple internal and external factors such as X-rays.

Until recently, the scientific community was unaware of the mechanism that allows the cell to recognise and report where the damage is located and what strategies need to be adopted to repair it. Fabrizio d'Adda di Fagagna found that in the damaged stretch of DNA, specific RNA molecules are produced that activate the signalling and repair mechanism. The project involves applying this discovery to the study of new anti-cancer drugs that may be effective and selective with certain forms of tumour,

including glioma multiforme. But that's not all: once it has been demonstrated that acting on the mechanism results in a therapeutic effect, other areas of application may open up, including the treatment of certain diseases associated with ageing such as cirrhosis of the liver and other forms of chronic inflammation.

*“This project opens up a whole new perspective for interpreting the ageing processes and the mechanisms of tumour transformation and progression related to the generation of DNA damage.” – comments **Fabrizio d’Adda di Fagagna** – “Thanks to this partnership, we can significantly accelerate the translational process linking scientific discovery to the development of new drugs.”*

According to the agreements negotiated by TTFactor, the technology transfer company founded by IFOM and IEO, at the end of the research plan, which involves the use of about €1 million over 18 months, the exclusive commercial rights licence will be handed over to a spin-off co-owned by IFOM and BiovelocITA.

BiovelocITA aims to expand its project portfolio

In addition to the strategic partnership with TTFactor, BiovelocITA is currently examining several other biotech projects that originated in Italy. This process of scouting and selection will continue in the year ahead, also trusting in a proactive attitude by other scientific institutions and universities active in the field of life sciences. In parallel with the academic partnerships, BiovelocITA has an ongoing initiative to open its share capital to new partners to increase its financial resources. At the end of its first year of operation, the company has available financial resources amounting to more than €7 million, provided by its partners among which Sofinnova Partners, a group of private investors, presented by **BANOR SIM S.p.A.** and also by **Atlante Seed** – a fund managed by IMI Fondi Chiusi SGR, an Intesa Sanpaolo group company.

“Turning a promising research project into a successful biotech company. This is the goal with which BiovelocITA was set up at the end of 2015. In Italy, it is not easy to create a bridge that is able to link the world of research with that of industry, to link a scientist that makes a discovery with potentially exceptional results in a laboratory with someone that is truly able to support the progress of this discovery in order to make it effective. That is precisely the focal point in which we intervene, and we will continue to intervene by intercepting and supporting the most deserving projects studying biotech,” says **Gabriella Camboni**, CEO of BiovelocITA.

*“The agreement with BiovelocITA offers our researchers a real opportunity to expand the results of the discoveries generated in one of the IFOM or IEO laboratories towards practical clinical application,” – concludes the CEO of TTFactor **Daniela Bellomo** – “For a scientist, it is a great opportunity to see their work come closer to innovative clinical applications.”*

*BiovelocITA S.r.l. is the first Italian accelerator dedicated to biotech. It was founded by Silvano Spinelli, Gabriella Camboni and Sofinnova Partners, the market-leading venture capital company specialising in the biosciences which, in 40 years in business, has funded and supported nearly 500 companies. Thanks to BiovelocITA, entrepreneurs, scientists and investors can work together to accelerate biotech projects with an international scope and reach the “proof of concept” that precedes the clinical phase. Set up in order to offer innovative solutions to the medical community and patients, BiovelocITA supports the creation and development of innovative biotech companies in all therapeutic areas.
www.biovelocita.com*

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