ENDPOINTS NEWS

Altimmune cuts hepatitis B program, reports more data on its GLP-1/glucagon for obesity and MASH

by **Katherine Lewin on March 27th, 2024**

Altimmune is ending its hepatitis B program following a trial failure, raising the stakes on its only remaining candidate in the pipeline — an injectable GLP-1/glucagon dual agonist for obesity and MASH — for which it also revealed new data Wednesday.

The company said that the overall response in its Phase 2 trial for HepTcell was "deemed to be insufficient to warrant further advancement" and Altimmune won't develop the immunotherapeutic any further.

In the trial, about 80 study participants with inactive chronic hepatitis B and low levels of hepatitis B surface antigen were randomized to either HepTcell or a placebo.

In the final quarter of 2023, Altimmune spent $1.1 million on the development of HepTcell. It is also

taking an impairment loss on an intangible asset of $12.4 million during the last quarter of 2023 "related to the acquired In-Process Research and Development asset associated with HepTcell," according to the company.

Altimmune's stock $ALT fell about 21% in pre-market trading following the announcement.

Positive data for obesity drug

Following the HepTcell failure, Altimmune's only remaining clinical candidate is its GLP-1/glucagon dual receptor agonist, pemvidutide. The company disclosed additional data from its Phase 2 MOMENTUM trial detailing the drug's effects on weight loss.

Altimmune reported in December that pemvidutide led to a mean weight loss of 15.6% at week 48, with plans to get ready for a Phase 3 trial in the second half of 2024. Pemvidutide's weight loss could set it up to compete in a competitive market with big players like Lilly's GIP/GLP-1 receptor agonist Zepbound, which spurred an average loss of 15.7% from starting body weight after 72 weeks of treatment in the SURMOUNT-2 study.

The company is still looking for a partner for a Phase 3 trial of pemvidutide and for commercialization, with a plan to have a strategic partner by the start of the next trial this year.

In Wednesday's financial filing, Altimmune added that patients on its drug only saw 25.5% of weight loss derived from lean mass, with 74.5% of weight loss from adipose tissue, saying it's important "because preservation of muscle mass drives continued weight loss and is a guard against sarcopenia," which is an age-related, involuntary loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength.

Pemvidutide also showed "robust reductions" of triglycerides, total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol on the highest dose in patients with elevated baseline lipids, as well as improvements in blood pressure.

Altimmune previously noted that its drug is differentiated because it has a 1:1 ratio of GLP-1 and glucagon.

"Pemvidutide is not a diabetes drug. It is a weight loss and lipid profile improvement drug, and cardiovascular outcomes we think are going to be even better," Altimmune president and CEO Vipin Garg told *Endpoints News*. "In order to achieve that, you need more than a little bit of glucagon in there, so there are drugs out there that have an 8:1 ratio, eight times as much GLP-1 to glucagon, so they're going to be where you can still call an agonist but really, there's very little glucagon activity in there."

Plans for MASH trial

Up to 78.6% of subjects with excess liver fat normalized their liver fat content in the Phase 2 trial, so Altimmune is also investigating pemvidutide in a Phase 2b trial in MASH in 190 patients with and without diabetes. The key endpoints are either MASH resolution or fibrosis improvement after 24 weeks of treatment with topline data expected in the first quarter of 2025.

“Many drugs for obesity would likely treat MASH and many drugs you know from MASH, if they have a weight loss component, will also treat obesity,” Garg said. “While as it turns out, not too many drugs being developed for MASH have any appreciable weight loss, so ours is the only drug that not only nukes the fat in the liver, but also people lose weight on it.”

The company had cash, cash equivalents and short-term investments totaling $198 million on Dec. 31, 2023.

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