Zenobia Therapeutics, Inc. Receives Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research Award for Work on PD-implicated Protein LRRK2

Zenobia Therapeutics, Inc. (Zenobia) announced today that it has received a Therapeutics Development Initiative award from The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research. The program targets industry-based research with potential to fundamentally alter the course of Parkinson's disease (PD) treatment. In collaboration with Dr. Christopher Ross of Johns Hopkins University, Zenobia will discover and develop compounds that block the activity of LRRK2, a protein that is believed to be overactive in PD patients. The goal is to preserve brain function by stopping the effects of the overactivity. If successful, the work could lead to a neuroprotective treatment for PD with potential to slow or stop the course of the disease -- something no currently available therapy has been proven to do. Current treatments alleviate the symptoms but do not attack the underlying disease, or alter its course.

Zenobia will use its fragment-based lead discovery (FBLD) expertise to discover compounds that bind to LRRK2. FBLD is a proven drug discovery approach where fragments of drugs are screened for ability to bind to a target. Fragments will be visualized bound to LRRK2 and evolved into compounds that block its activity. These compounds will be tested for their ability to protect neurons in cell culture, and to reverse effects of the overactive protein in animal models. "I believe Zenobia's methods represent a unique and tremendously exciting approach to drug discovery," said Christopher A. Ross, M.D., Ph.D, Professor of Psychiatry, Neurology and Neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University, and chair of Zenobia's Scientific Advisory Board. "The fragment-based screening method has the potential to identify and develop novel compounds not present in the libraries of large pharmaceutical companies. It also is more likely to identify small ligands with a better chance of good penetration into the brain, making it especially suitable for targeting neurological and psychiatric diseases."

Dr. Ross is a leader in neurodegenerative disease research; he helped to define LRRK2 as a PD target, and is an expert in its biology. As part of the collaboration, Zenobia will have access to cell assays and animal models developed by the Ross laboratory. "We are very excited to combine our expertise in fragment-based lead discovery with the expertise of Dr. Ross," said Vicki Nienaber, Ph.D., President and Founder of Zenobia. "We are a long way from a cure, but we took the first step this week with the help of the Michael J. Fox foundation."

Zenobia's research is focused on debilitating, limited-population diseases that have no cure. Zenobia combines fragment-based lead discovery with the expertise of biologists and clinicians to find treatments for illnesses such as Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease and Muscular Dystrophy. In the future, Zenobia will focus on psychiatric diseases in parallel with increased understanding of the biology of these diseases.