

EMERGING COMPANY PROFILE

SV Health-incubated Catamaran debuts with \$42M to develop CAR NK pipeline

BY VIRGINIA LI, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Catamaran debuted Monday with a \$42 million series A round to advance a pipeline of allogeneic CAR NK cell therapies that seed investor SV Health hopes can “democratize access to cell therapy.”

SV’s Houman Ashrafian said the firm had been looking to create a cell therapy startup with “a truly off-the-shelf approach that is manufacturable at a reasonable cost and can be delivered to patients efficiently in the last mile,” is efficacious in solid tumors, and is able to overcome the immunosuppressive tumor microenvironment.

Catamaran Bio Inc.’s co-founders include Ashrafian, Kevin Pojasek and Tim Harris from SV; Branden Moriarity, an assistant professor in the department of pediatrics, division of hematology/oncology at the University of Minnesota; and Catherine Bollard, a professor at George Washington University and director of the center for cancer immunology research at the Children’s National Research Institute.

Its management team includes CSO Vipin Suri, who was most recently head of biology at cancer metabolism play Raze Therapeutics Inc. and co-founder and VP of discovery at gene and cell therapy company Obsidian Therapeutics; COO Mark Boshar, who was VP, legal affairs at red blood cell play Rubius Therapeutics Inc. (NASDAQ:RUBY); and CMO Chris Carpenter, who was Rubius’ CMO.

The company is generating CAR NK cell therapies with its TAILWIND platform, which incorporates non-viral NK cell engineering IP from the University of Minnesota and technologies to boost the potency of NK cells from Children’s National Research Institute.

“We’re building a platform that addresses end-to-end problems with end-to-end solutions, from harvesting donor cells and how you pick the donors to engineering the cells and infusing them into patients,” said Suri. “We’ve seen a lot of specialization on certain problems like sourcing, but we are building all the pieces.”

Suri said Catamaran is using structure-based algorithms to design CARs that are optimized for NK cell signaling, and synthetic biology to design sense and response systems in its CAR NK cells to neutralize immunosuppressive signals in the tumor microenvironment.

COMPANY PROFILE CATAMARAN BIO INC.

Cambridge, Mass.

Technology: CAR NK cell therapies

Origin of technology: In-house, Children’s National Research Institute, University of Minnesota

Disease focus: Cancer

Clinical status: Preclinical

Founded: 2019 by Houman Ashrafian, Kevin Pojasek, Tim Harris, Branden Moriarity, Catherine Bollard

University collaborators: University of Minnesota, Children’s National Research Institute

Corporate partners: None

Number of employees: 16

Funds raised: \$42 million

Investors: Sofinnova Partners, Lightstone Ventures, SV Health Investors, Takeda Ventures, Astellas Venture Management

COO: Mark Boshar

Patents: None issued

The newco is also using transposon systems to deliver genetic payloads into NK cells. Suri said that approach may confer several advantages over viral-based approaches, including speed, cost-effectiveness of manufacturing and larger capacity.

Furthermore, in early clinical studies, CAR NK cells have not triggered safety issues such as cytokine release syndrome and neurotoxicity commonly seen with CAR T therapies.

Catamaran hasn’t disclosed preclinical data, nor has it named specific targets or indications for its lead programs. Suri said the company is in lead optimization and plans to progress to an IND over the next few years.

Sofinnova Partners and Lightstone Ventures led the A round, which also saw participation from SV Health, Takeda Ventures and Astellas Venture Management.

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