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Montis Biosciences launched with €8,4 million seed financing and a novel approach to immune-oncology

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Leuven, Belgium, February 20, 2020. Montis Biosciences announces its launch with €8,4 million in seed financing from an international investor syndicate to investigate interactions between perivascular macrophages and tumor vasculature. The company's mission is to exploit these cellular interactions with therapeutics to drive and sustain immune reactions against solid tumors.

Montis was founded by Droia Ventures, VIB and KU Leuven based on the foundational science discovered by the labs of Peter Carmeliet (VIB-KU Leuven) and Massimiliano Mazzone (VIB-KU Leuven). For the seed financing, the founders were joined by new investors Polaris Partners, ALSA Ventures and Pfizer Ventures, the venture capital arm of Pfizer Inc. (NYSE: PFE).

Blood vessels regulate the influx of immune cells into tumors. They do so under direction of perivascular macrophages, which can stimulate blood vessels to attract immune cells and let them pass into the tumor, or can induce blood vessel dysfunction and create an immune-compromised environment in the tumor. Montis' proprietary insights into how these two classes of cells interact now allows for modulation of these interactions to ensure a strong influx of fresh immune cells into the tumor. The seed financing will allow Montis to prioritize among a set of targets and to validate its lead programs for further development towards clinical studies. Montis will also expand its unique screening and assay platform to identify and validate additional promising targets.

"It is becoming increasingly clear that endothelial cells in the tumor vasculature play a major role in immune reactions to cancer and that their interaction with immune cells shapes this response. Historical therapies targeting the tumor vasculature largely ignored this role and instead destroyed the vessels to starve the tumor," says professor Peter Carmeliet. "Our research is showing that rather than destroying blood vessels, we can use them to herd the correct immune cells to the tumor and get much more potent and sustainable effects."

"Our approach with single-cell RNA-sequence data from real patient tumors finally allows us to investigate the communication between immune cells and the tumor vasculature," adds professor Massimiliano Mazzone. "Montis is the step forward to translate this concept into therapeutic applications."

Montis' Board of Directors will be composed of Executive Chairman and Droia Partner, Luc Dochez, and VIB Head New Ventures, Griet Vanpoucke, who will be joined by Ellie McGuire (Polaris Partners), Sohaib Mir (ALSA Ventures) and Rana Al-Hallaq (Pfizer Ventures).

"We're very pleased to have been able to bring together the world-class science from the VIB-KU Leuven labs of Peter Carmeliet and Massimiliano Mazzone with an investor syndicate that is excellently positioned to ensure the long-term success of the company," says Luc Dochez, Partner at Droia Ventures and Executive Chairman at Montis. "Montis has a unique approach to target solid tumors that should be able to really shift the paradigm on multiple indications."

“We are excited to work with Droia Ventures in this oncology focused company co-creation effort,” comments Johan Cardoen, managing director of VIB. “Montis is a prime example of how scientific excellence complemented with an entrepreneurial mindset and hands-on early stage investors can result in a promising new venture.”

About Montis Biosciences
Montis Biosciences develops novel immune-oncology therapeutics targeting the intersection between vascular dysfunction and immune suppression to treat solid tumors. Based on the work of Profs. Peter Carmeliet and Massimiliano Mazzone, Montis created a unique target screening and assay platform to discover novel targets modulating interactions between tumor endothelial cells and perivascular macrophages. Montis is backed by leading life science investors Droia Ventures, Polaris Partners, ALSA Ventures and Pfizer Ventures. www.montisbio.com.

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