Press Release

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New HIV drugs on the horizon
Society for Applied Microbiology annual Summer Conference
Hilton Hotel, Cardiff
3 July 2013

A team at the University of St Andrews, led by early career researcher Dr Catherine Adamson, is chasing the next generation of anti-HIV drugs, a conference in Cardiff will hear today.

Dr Adamson will give the Society for Applied Microbiology (SFAM) New Lecturer Research Grant Lecture this afternoon (3 July 2013) when she will share findings from her work on Bevirimat, a novel class of anti-HIV-1 drug.

Dr Adamson said “The grant I received from SFAM has been a great boost early in my career. I’m determined to get to the bottom of how this class of anti-HIV drug works and how the virus acquires drug resistance. Hopefully our research has played, and will continue to play, an important role in moving this class of drug towards the clinic”.

Bevirimat targets a process called maturation, when a new virus particle becomes able to infect immune cells and continue the virus life cycle in the body.

Although anti-HIV drugs allow many HIV-positive people to live long and healthy lives, the rapid emergence of drug resistance is always a concern. Many of the existing anti-HIV drugs were developed to interfere with one or more aspects of the virus life cycle and Bevirimat is no different. Importantly, however, Bevirimat targets a novel aspect of the virus life cycle.

Bevirimat showed great potential in phase IIb clinical trials against HIV. But despite being a good drug for some people, for others it didn’t work well at all. Naturally occurring minor genetic differences in the virus that confer Bevirimat resistance have been shown to be the reason why the drug didn’t work well in some HIV-infected patients. Derivatives of Bevirimat have now been generated that tackle these problems, opening the way for clinical testing of second-generation maturation inhibitors.

Dr Adamson has played an important role in identifying the effect of Bevirimat on the maturation process, understanding drug resistance, and its performance in phase IIb clinical trials. Her team’s on-going studies to investigate how this class of drug works and how resistance is acquired will complement future efforts to develop this class of drugs for treatment of HIV-infected patients.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Society for Applied Microbiology (SfAM)

SfAM is the oldest UK microbiological society and the voice of Applied Microbiology within the UK. SfAM has members across the globe from all sectors of applied microbiology.

SfAM works in partnership with sister organizations and microbiological bodies to ensure that microbiology and microbiologists are able to exert influence on policymakers within the UK, in Europe and worldwide. SfAM publishes five internationally acclaimed journals with Wiley-Blackwell.