

Ebola drug maker Fujifilm to buy US vaccine maker (Update)

October 27 2014

Fujifilm said Monday it would buy a US vaccine maker as the Japanese firm increases its supply of an experimental Ebola drug to help stem the spread of the virus.

The deal would see Fujifilm take a 49 percent stake in Kalon Biotherapeutics, with plans to buy the whole company "in the future", the company said, without supplying financial details.

Japan's leading Nikkei business daily said the acquisition would be worth several billion yen (tens of millions of dollars).

Kalon, established in 2011 by the State of Texas and Texas A&M University as a contract maker of biopharmaceutical products, can safely handle and produce vaccines against deadly pathogens including anthrax, Fujifilm said, as it looks to further tap the health sector.

The firm's shares jumped 2.88 percent to 3,691.0 yen in Tokyo on Monday.

Fujifilm said last week it would increase its stock of Avigan, which has been given to several patients who were evacuated from Ebola-hit West Africa to Europe.

The firm said it has enough Avigan tablets—approved as an influenza drug in Japan—to treat 20,000 people and enough of its active ingredient for 300,000 treatments.

Some research papers report that Avigan has been effective in testing with mice, the company said.

The governments of France and Guinea are planning to conduct clinical trials with Avigan in mid-November.

If the drug proves effective against a virus that has killed nearly 5,000 people, it would burnish Fujifilm's credentials in the pharmaceutical field.

It would also lend support to its broader move into a range of sectors—including cosmetics, dietary supplements and medical equipment—after demand for camera film plummeted a decade ago.

Fujifilm, once among the biggest makers of film, has been moving into new sectors as its traditional business suffers.

The company previously bought two biopharmaceutical firms from US drug giant Merck, while it launched beauty product businesses that include anti-ageing facecreams under the brand Astalift.

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