

Health researchers work with startup on colon cancer vaccine

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Kepeng Wang, assistant professor of immunology, right, works with research associate Kasandra Rodriguez in the lab at CaroGen Corp. in the technology incubator at Farmington. Credit: Peter Morenus/UConn Photo

The University of Connecticut and emerging immunotherapy company CaroGen Corp. have begun a collaboration to develop a vaccine for

treatment of patients with colon cancer.

CaroGen's proprietary technology platform will be applied to a specific target studied by UConn Health researchers Kepeng Wang, assistant professor of immunology, and Anthony T. Vella, professor and Boehringer Ingelheim Chair in Immunology.

CaroGen Corp.'s platform is a transformative virus-like vesicle (VLV) technology developed at Yale University School of Medicine and exclusively licensed by CaroGen for the development and commercialization of immunotherapies worldwide.

Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States. It is expected to cause over 49,000 deaths during 2016, and the risk to individuals increases with age. Wang's target, Interleukin-17 (IL-17), a pleiotropic pro inflammatory cytokine, can promote cancer-elicited inflammation and prevent cancer cells from immune surveillance.

"While the death rate from [colon cancer](#) has been dropping for several decades thanks to screening and improved treatment, our goal is to reach close to a 100 percent survival rate," said CaroGen's President and CEO, Bijan Almassian. "By combining our platform with Dr. Wang's very promising target, we hope that a new powerful immunotherapy will be developed to provide patients with that assurance."

The company will have the right to exclusively license intellectual property developed by UConn through this collaboration, for human and animal health use.

The company is one of 21 biotech startups now housed at the Technology Incubator Program (TIP) on the UConn Health campus in Farmington, which helps develop new biotechnology concepts into

businesses. CaroGen is leveraging the resources of the program to develop a portfolio of immunotherapies, with a lead program in chronic hepatitis B viral infection in collaboration with researchers from Yale University School of Medicine and Albany Medical College.

It is also working on the development of VLV immunotherapies against *C. difficile* bacterial infection in collaboration with Kamal Khanna, assistant professor of immunology at UConn Health, and a vaccine against the Zika virus with Paulo Verardi, associate professor of pathology at UConn Storrs.

"CaroGen is proving to be both a scientific and entrepreneurial leader in Connecticut," said Dr. Jeff Seemann, UConn's vice president for research. "Dr. Almassian has led multiple efforts to apply the CaroGen technology in collaborations with UConn researchers where critical and urgent health care needs exist. We are very excited about this latest endeavor, which we believe will yield significant therapeutic and commercial opportunities through the combined expertise of UConn Health's Department of Immunology and CaroGen."

Provided by University of Connecticut

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