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news release

TARIQUIDAR, QLT'S LATE STAGE CANCER COMPOUND, SHOWS ADVANTAGES OVER PREVIOUS GENERATIONS OF P-GP INHIBITORS

Key data presented at the ASCO Meeting in Orlando, Florida

For Immediate Release

May 21, 2002

VANCOUVER, CANADA—QLT Inc. (NASDAQ: QLTI; TSE: QLT) announced that data on its late stage cancer compound, tariquidar will be presented today at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), the premier conference for medical oncologists.

“The data presented shows that tariquidar is an effective inhibitor of P-gp, a membrane protein that pumps out chemotherapy,” said Dr. Tito Fojo, a leading oncologist with the National Cancer Institute and one of the investigators in the trial. “We were able to show this using a chemical whose accumulation in tumors depends on the activity of P-gp, in much the same way the accumulation of chemotherapy depends on the activity of P-gp. If tariquidar’s effectiveness is proven in the Phase III clinical trials it will represent a significant step forward in the treatment of multi-drug resistance in cancer patients.”

The concepts of multi-drug resistance and P-gp interaction are attracting increased interest and awareness at various cancer meetings. At the recent 93rd Annual Meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) in San Francisco, tariquidar was featured in several oral and poster presentations for its potential as a potent third-generation P-gp inhibitor with a reduced propensity to negatively affect the pharmacokinetic profile of chemotherapeutic agents.

QLT signed an exclusive license agreement with Xenova Group plc for the development and marketing in the United States, Canada and Mexico for tariquidar in the treatment of cancer.

About Multi-Drug Resistance and P-gp Inhibition

One of the major barriers to successful cancer treatment is the development of resistance by cancer cells to several drugs used in chemotherapy—a condition referred to as multi-drug resistance (MDR). Tariquidar targets the most common form of this drug resistance through the inhibition of P-glycoprotein (P-gp), a membrane based “pump” that acts to expel the chemotherapy drug from the tumor cell, thereby preventing drug accumulation and inhibiting efficacy. Accumulating evidence indicates that the inhibition of P-gp can improve chemotherapeutic outcomes in several types of cancer.

Unsuccessful clinical trials with earlier-generation modulators of MDR were associated with unpredictable pharmacokinetic interactions, which required chemotherapy dose reductions to avoid excessive toxicity. In addition, first- and second-generation modulators tested in clinical trials only slowed the rate at which chemotherapy drugs were pumped out of the cell by “blocking” the pump for a short-lived length of time. Normal pump function would then return, and the chemotherapy drug would again be removed from the tumor cell. In contrast, tariquidar is not pumped by P-gp but instead binds with high affinity to P-gp, resulting in long-lasting, specific and effective inhibition of P-gp function.

Multi-drug resistance (MDR) is a problem for many of the most common cancers and involves some of the most widely administered chemotherapeutic agents. In 2001, these drugs accounted for over 1.6 million office-based administrations by medical oncologists in the U.S., according to IMS NDTI database.

Clinical Development Plan

Tariquidar is currently in a Phase II breast cancer trial at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. QLT plans to initiate a large Phase III non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) program shortly. An interim analysis is planned for mid-2003 in order to mitigate the financial risk of the program. Upon successful completion of the Phase III program, it is anticipated that QLT will initially file for approval of tariquidar in the U.S. for use in combination with first line chemotherapy in advanced NSCLC in 2005. NSCLC is the first of several indications for which tariquidar will be investigated.

Tariquidar has completed a series of three separate Phase IIa trials in which the product was administered together with three of the world’s most commonly used chemotherapy agents (paclitaxel, doxorubicin and vinorelbine), each of which is known to be affected by this resistance mechanism. The successful outcome of the tariquidar trials was announced in late 2000/early 2001. The trials demonstrated that the combination of tariquidar with a chemotherapy agent was safe and well tolerated. Further, no clinically significant pharmacokinetic interaction was found between tariquidar and the chemotherapy drug, a problem encountered by previous generation MDR inhibitors. This benefit allows the chemotherapy agent to be administered at its full normal clinical dose for optimal efficacy.

QLT Inc. is a global biopharmaceutical company dedicated to the discovery, development and commercialization of innovative therapies to treat cancer, eye diseases and immune disorders.

Combining expertise in ophthalmology, oncology and photodynamic therapy, QLT has commercialized two products to date, including Visudyne® therapy which is the largest selling ophthalmology product ever launched.

For more information, you are invited to visit our web site at www.qltinc.com.

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QLT Inc. is listed on the Nasdaq Stock Market under the trading symbol “QLTI” and on The Toronto Stock Exchange under the trading symbol “QLT.”

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