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# Clinical update boosts Viralytics

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BIOTECHS

Australian immunotherapy play Viralytics continues to boost interest in its cancer drug, with an update on clinical studies of its treatment, days after signing a deal with pharmaceuticals giant Merck.

Viralytics managing director Malcolm McColl presented updated data at the annual meeting of the Society for the Immunotherapy of Cancer in the US, outlining that the latest positive findings on its drug, Cavatak, supported the potential benefits of combining that drug with widely known cancer drug Keytruda.

The company announced on Friday it had entered a clinical trial collaboration agreement with US giant Merck to evaluate the combination of Cavatak with Merck's drug, Keytruda.

Keytruda became a known cancer drug in Australia after prominent businessman and former Melbourne lord mayor and former chairman of Fairfax Media Ron Walker campaigned for it to be listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme after he used it successfully to treat melanoma.

Merck and Viralytics are going to examine the effects of combining the two treatments.

Cavatak, an immunotherapy used to treat melanoma, has previously been proven to have strong anti-cancer activity in late-stage patients, while also

being well tolerated. It is described as an investigational novel cancer immunotherapy based on a common cold virus that has been shown to preferentially infect and attack cancer cells.

Keytruda works by increasing the ability of the body's immune system to help detect and fight tumour cells. It can affect both tumour cells and healthy cells.

The two companies are hopeful there could be potential benefit in combining Cavatak with Keytruda as they have different, yet complementary, approaches to engaging the immune system to fight cancer.

The clinical trial, which will start next year, will evaluate the safety and efficacy of the proposed immunotherapy combination in patients with either advanced stage non-small cell lung cancer or metastatic bladder cancer.

Professor Hardev Pandha, director of the Surrey Cancer Research Institute at the University of Surrey and principal investigator of Viralytics' clinical study, said he looked forward to the initiation of the second stage of Viralytics' trial to assess the combination of Cavatak with Keytruda.

Mr McColl had flagged earlier this year that the company was on the radar of big pharmaceutical companies given positive results for its cancer treatment.

Shares in Viralytics were flat at 68c yesterday.