

Yaupon Therapeutics tests treatment for meth addicts

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STAFF WRITER

RADNOR — Yaupon Therapeutics has initiated human clinical testing of its plant-derived experimental treatment for methamphetamine addiction.

The drug company is testing Lobeline in a phase-I safety trial. Lobeline was developed from a substance found in the Lobelia plant — also known as the cardinal flower.

Lobeline's medicinal use dates to the Native Americans, who smoked the plant's leaves as a treatment for asthma. The company's name, Yaupon, reflects that heritage. Yaupon is an American Indian word for tree leaf.



Alonso

Yaupon expects to begin phase-II and phase-III clinical trials of another product in its pipeline, Clearazide, a potential treatment for cutaneous T-cell lymphoma. Cutaneous T-cell lymphoma is a difficult-to-treat skin cancer that afflicts 20,000 Americans.

"Embarking on clinical trials for two medically significant indications just two years after establishing our company represents a major achievement for Yaupon," said Robert Alonso, the company's president and CEO. "Methamphetamine is notoriously addictive, and it has devastated large numbers of American families and their communities. We are developing what may be the first agent to treat this damaging addiction."

Health experts estimate more than a million Americans suffer from methamphetamine addiction, largely because of the highly addictive nature, easy accessibility and low cost of such drugs.

The Food and Drug Administration has granted Clearazide orphan drug status, a designation given to experimental drugs being developed to treat rare diseases or conditions. The status will provide Yaupon with extended patent protection for the product if it eventually receives FDA approval.

Should the company's clinical trials yield positive results, Yaupon is hopeful it will be able to complete the regulatory review process and begin marketing the compound in 2007.

Yaupon, which has its headquarters in Radnor and its research laboratories at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, has received more than \$3 million in research aid from the National Institutes of Health.

Also, the company got \$500,000 from BioAdvance, operators of the Biotechnology Greenhouse of Southeastern Pennsylvania, to support its ongoing research.

"Yaupon's success at launching clinical trials for Lobeline and Clearazide illustrates the importance of our mission to provide critical support to promising life sciences enterprises in our region," said Barbara Schilberg, CEO and managing director of BioAdvance.

Alonso said the funding helped the company, which has 10 employees, hire people with the regulatory experience Yaupon

needed to prepare its FDA applications.

"We believe we put the money to good use," he said. "Our target was to get Lobeline into clinical trials and we have demonstrated we can work the FDA and get a clinical trial going."

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The Lobelia plant is the source of the experimental addiction treatment drug.

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