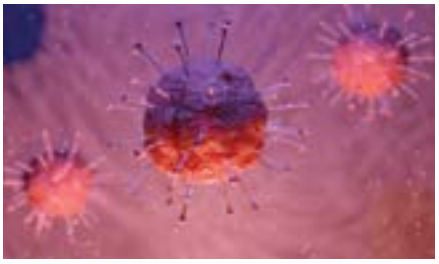
GLOBAL PHARMA 360

News of Note

CORONAVIRUS TRACKER: MERCK JUMPS INTO VACCINE RACE; GILEAD'S REMDESIVIR WORKS BEST IN PATIENTS ON OXYGEN



Merck has struck a deal to buy Themis to accelerate development of a COVID-19 vaccine. The takeover will see Merck apply its vaccine capabilities to a candidate based on Themis' measles vector platform that is set to enter the clinic this year.

The Big Pharma also plans to leverage previous work on its Ebola Zaire vaccine, Ervebo, as it partners with nonprofit IAVI to advance a COVID-19 vaccine.

And Merck also announced a partnership with Ridgeback Biotherapeutics to develop EIDD-2801, an oral antiviral candidate to treat patients with COVID-19.

The World Health Organization is putting a stop to global studies into the effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine after repeated safety concerns. The decision came following a study published in Lancet that showed patients who took hydroxychloroquine were at higher risk of death and heart problems than those who did not.

Gilead's remdesivir has shown promising results, but some limits, too. Detailed data published in the New England Journal of Medicine showed that on average, hospitalized patients receiving remdesivir recovered a median of four days faster than patients on placebo, with mortality in the remdesivir group at 7.1% compared to the placebo group's 11.9%. But the data also suggest the drug offers more benefits to patients on oxygen therapy than to the critically ill on mechanical ventilators.

Oxford University's Adrian Hill warned that data from AstraZeneca's experimental coronavirus vaccine trial has a 50% chance of proving useless as social distancing does its work. Successful containment efforts have reduced the number of participants infected with the virus, prompting Hill to backpedal on earlier projections of an 80% shot at an effective vaccine by September.

SURVEY: 72% OF CONSUMERS HAVE CHANGED HEALTHCARE USE SINCE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 has impacted the healthcare of 72% of consumers, a recent survey found, with a majority saying they have already delayed or plan to put off health procedures.

The survey underscores the issues providers face in convincing consumers to return for in-person care that has been delayed due to the pandemic.

The survey found 41% delayed their healthcare services. Another 42% feel uncomfortable going to a hospital for any medical treatment, and 45% don't want to go to an urgent care or walk-in clinic.

The hesitancy is likely to continue as 74% of respondents believe there will be a resurgence of COVID-19 in the fall or winter.

But while consumers are scared of going to a doctor's office, they don't feel the same way about heading to a pharmacy.

Nearly half of respondents reported feeling very comfortable picking up a prescription at their local pharmacy and speaking to a pharmacist about their medication.

SANOFI, REGENERON BOOST DUPIXENT'S MEGABLOCKBUSTER QUEST WITH LATEST TRIAL WIN

Dupixent cut patients' difficulty swallowing by 69% after 24 weeks compared with an improvement of 32% in eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE) patients treated with placebo, according to data from the first segment of a phase 3 trial

In the 81-patient study, those treated with weekly 300-milligram doses of Dupixent also saw a significant reduction in esophageal eosinophil levels—a measure of inflammation—compared with placebo.

PHARMA ASIA

1. Researchers detailed positive phase 1 data for CanSino Biologics' COVID-19 vaccine in The Lancet but cautioned against readthrough to protection
2. Takeda's Alunbrig scores nod for earlier lung cancer use, but a Roche showdown awaits

3. GlaxoSmithKline hands Samsung Biologics $231M to scale up manufacturing
4. India's BDR Pharma seeks government backing to make Gilead's remdesivir
5. I-Mab moves anti-GM-CSF antibody into phase 1b COVID-19 study
6. EdiGene pairs with Immunochina to develop CAR-T Therapy

IN ANOTHER ROUND OF MERCK VS. MERCK, GERMANY-BASED MERCK KGAA NOTCHES A WIN IN THE U.K.

The latest? After years of wrangling, the high court of England recently ruled that Merck & Co. infringed on Merck KGaA's trademark in that country.

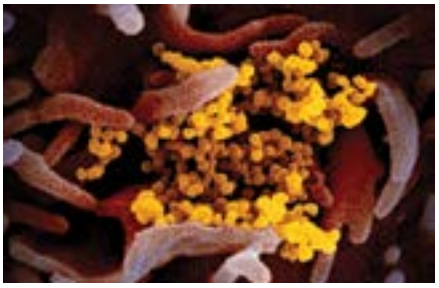
Confused? That's been the issue going back 65 years to 1955 when the two companies first entered into an agreement over who would be called what and where. The deal, updated in 1970, basically gave Merck KGaA the right to the Merck name everywhere except Canada and the U.S. Outside the U.S. and Canada, Merck & Co is known as MSD, while Merck KGaA inside the U.S. and Canada goes by EMD Group.

However, the digital age has exacerbated the Merck vs. Merck naming problem.

Key in the most recent decision, is the use of "merck.com" by U.K. employees in their emails. Merck & Co. said it is likely that all MSD employees in the U.K. will change their email addresses from @merck.com to @msd.com.

While this latest U.K. round goes to Merck KGaA, a U.S. lawsuit filed in New Jersey by Merck & Co. in January 2016 alleges its own trademark infringements against Merck KGaA and is still pending.

RESEARCHERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND ARE DEVELOPING A SIMPLE, EXPERIMENTAL DIAGNOSTIC TEST FOR COVID-19 THAT COULD PROVIDE A VISUAL RESULT IN 10 MINUTES, WITHOUT ANY LABORATORY EQUIPMENT.



Using gold nanoparticles suspended in liquid, the test is designed to react in the presence of the novel coronavirus's specific genetic material and help diagnose an active infection.

After extracting RNA from a nasal swab or saliva sample, the nanoparticles begin to bind to the virus's specific proteins—and as the gold begins to cluster, it changes the color of the liquid from purple to blue, a process visible to the naked eye.

Based on preliminary results, researchers believe this promising new test may detect RNA material from the virus as early as the first day of infection.

FDA AUTHORIZES NEW ROCHE TEST FOR IDENTIFYING HIGH-RISK COVID-19 PATIENTS

Roche received the OK for a new type of coronavirus diagnostic test—not to confirm an active infection or previous exposure to the disease, but to help identify whether a person with COVID-19 has a high risk of developing severe complications.

The Elecsys test measures levels of the immune system biomarker interleukin 6, or IL-6, found in the bloodstream. it has been previously used in Europe to help screen people who may suffer from severe sepsis and inflammation following trauma or major surgery.

Now, Roche says the test's results can help give clinicians advanced warning for those who may enter respiratory failure and require a ventilator.

The test is designed to provide a result in less than 20 minutes, while running up to 300 samples per hour on Roche's cobas lab equipment.

ASCO: GILEAD CAR-T MED YESCARTA DELIVERS 93% RESPONSE RATE IN SLOW-GROWING LYMPHOMA

Gilead Sciences is working to move CAR-T therapy Yescarta into other types of non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL), and if data from an interim trial look-in are any indication, it's well on its way.

In a phase 2 study of patients with relapsed or refractory indolent non-Hodgkin lymphoma—which encompasses follicular lymphoma and marginal zone lymphoma—Yescarta spurred a benefit in 93% of patients and cleared cancer completely in 80%.

At 15.3 months of follow-up, patients' responses to treatment had lasted a median 20.8 months, and Yescarta had kept cancer at bay for a median 23.5 months.