



Roche Seeks to Test New Delivery Method for Eye Drug

Reuters News

By Bill Berkrot

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* Says will make milestone payment to device developer

* Device would reduce number of injections into eye

Jan 13 (Reuters) - Roche's Genentech unit said it plans to seek permission from U.S. health regulators to begin clinical trials of a new implantable delivery system for its Lucentis eye drug.

The company also said on Friday that it would make its first milestone payment to privately held ForSight Vision4, which developed the implantable ocular device - a refillable port designed to release Lucentis over a period of months. It is anticipated that the port would need to be refilled no more frequently than every four months, Genentech said.

Roche in late 2010 signed a deal with ForSight giving it exclusive worldwide rights to the delivery system for certain ophthalmic therapies.

Genentech did not disclose the amount of the milestone payment. It said it was in the process of preparing its application seeking a green light from the Food and Drug Administration to begin clinical trials of the delivery device.

Lucentis, which improves vision in patients suffering from wet age-related macular degeneration - the leading cause of blindness in the elderly - is currently administered via monthly injections in the eye.

The ForSight delivery system could dramatically reduce the need for eye injections, which would not only be applauded by needle averse patients but likely reduce the incidence of serious side effects related to the injections. It could also give Lucentis a competitive advantage over Eyelea, a new rival drug from Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc that currently is injected less frequently than Lucentis.

"This development reflects Genentech's commitment to ophthalmology and investigating new technologies that may potentially provide sustained delivery of Lucentis and reduce the frequency of injections," Hal Barron, Roche's chief medical officer, said in a statement.

Lucentis is also approved to treat macular edema following retinal vein occlusion, a swelling or thickening of the part of the retina responsible for central vision.

(Reporting By Bill Berkrot; Editing by Bernard Orr)

ROCHE/LUCENTIS