



For Immediate Release

## **The NIH Awards Aciont® a Small Business Catalyst Award Grant Accelerating Innovative Research**

*Aciont is awarded a phase I SBIR \$214K grant for the project titled “Novel Method for the Ocular Iontophoretic Delivery of Avastin® and Lucentis®”*

Salt Lake City, UT – July 7, 2010 – The National Eye Institute (NEI) in conjunction with the Office of the Director of the National Institutes of Health awarded a \$214K (two hundred and fourteen thousand dollars) research grant to Aciont Inc. to investigate the feasibility of delivery of Avastin® and Lucentis® to the eye using the Visulex® ocular application device (Award Number R43EY020791).

The goal of the project is to develop a safe and effective ocular iontophoresis drug delivery system for high molecular weight drugs or macromolecules. Thus, project investigators believe this project has the potential to provide a non-invasive and patient-friendly drug delivery system to treat age related macular degeneration. Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of blindness above the age of 50. Lucentis® is an FDA approved drug for the treatment of the wet form of AMD; and Avastin® is being used by some retinal specialists as an alternative cost effective, off labeled drug for the same indication. However, both drugs must be applied through frequent intravitreal injections which pose significant risks and side effects to the patient and financial burden to our health care system. This grant enables further study of drug delivery through transscleral iontophoresis, a method of using a mild electrical current to drive drugs through tissues. Goals of the awarded project are to lower long-term healthcare costs considerably for retinal diseases in light of our emerging aging population and limited pool of retinal specialists in the United States and enhancing the treatment of AMD and other related sight threatening diseases while posing little or practically no risk to the patient.

“This is a great testimonial to the technical strengths of Aciont and its ability to undertake such a challenging drug delivery approach for back of the eye diseases like AMD,” said Balbir Brar, Ph.D., D.V.M., Aciont’s Vice President of Research and Development. “The Aciont team should be commended for this national recognition by the NIH and I am personally very excited about this project,” Brar added.

The grant has several specific aims including the pharmacokinetic, safety and efficacy assessment of the iontophoretic administration of macromolecular drugs to the eye *in vivo*. The project expands upon previous research on ocular iontophoresis conducted by S. Kevin Li, Sarah

Molokhia and William I. Higuchi. Previous studies using a real time MRI pharmacokinetic methodology provided some evidence of the potential iontophoretic delivery of a surrogate macromolecule to the posterior section of an eye in rabbit. The successful execution of the project requires the combination of expertise from separate research departments at the University of Utah such as the John A. Moran Eye Center, Department of Pharmaceutics and Pharmaceutical Chemistry, and Department of Radiology. The lead investigators of this new grant are William I Higuchi, Ph.D., Sarah Molokhia, Ph.D. and Kongnara Papapangkorn, Ph.D.. Additional contributors to the project from Utah faculty includes Paul S. Bernstein, M.D., Ph.D., Eun-Kee Jeong, Ph.D. and James N. Herron, Ph.D.. S. Kevin Li, Ph.D., from the University of Cincinnati also is a project contributor.

According to the NIH, the Small Business Catalyst Award program is “further expected to support entrepreneurs of exceptional creativity, drawn from scientific and technological environments beyond NIH, who propose pioneering and possibly transformative approaches to addressing major biomedical or behavioral challenges with the potential for downstream commercial development. The Small Business Catalyst Award for Accelerating Innovative Research funding opportunity intends to encourage fresh research perspectives and approaches to serve the mission of NIH.” The specific project described above is supported by Award Number R43EY020791 from the National Eye Institute. More information about the project can be accessed from NIH’s website link at <http://report.nih.gov/recovery/ARRAGrants.cfm> (click on the link to Utah grants). The content of the awarded project is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Eye Institute and the National Institutes of Health.

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Aciont Inc. is a specialty biopharmaceutical company endeavoring to become the world leader in commercializing localized, non-invasive (topical passive diffusion-based and iontophoretic), controlled and sustained release back of the eye therapeutics for sight threatening diseases such as severe uveitis, diabetic macular edema and age-related macular degeneration. Aciont’s goal is to provide ophthalmologists substantially greater freedom in treating and/or preventing chronic eye diseases through optimal drug dosing and improved patient/physician compliance. Aciont is located in Salt Lake City, Utah. For more information, visit the company’s website at [www.aciont.com](http://www.aciont.com).

Source: Aciont Inc.

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