Novavax's Ebola vaccine is in hot pursuit of GSK, Merck, J&J candidates

February 18, 2015 | By Amirah Al Idrus

Novavax (NVAX) announced on Thursday that it would take its Ebola candidate to Australia for a Phase I trial involving 230 healthy adults. It is the fourth company to bring an Ebola vaccine to human trials--behind Big Pharmas GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), Merck (MRK) and Johnson & Johnson (JNJ)--but Novavax isn't worried. Novavax's R&D chief, Dr. Greg Glenn, says it has a better vaccine.

"The need for an Ebola vaccine is not going to go away. … I think there's going to be a need for a very good vaccine. I think this vaccine is really a high-quality construct and we intend to see it developed," Glenn told FierceVaccines.

The Ebola GP vaccine is named so because it's a glycoprotein (GP) recombinant nanoparticle jab. This differentiates it from the other candidates in development, which are all vector-based.

In vector-based vaccines, there can be a mismatch between the strain that is causing the disease and the predicted strain used to make the vaccine, like in this year's flu shot, Glenn said.

The other vaccines that have been deployed in the field "have been matched to old strains of Ebola," he said. What's different about Novavax's vaccine is that the gene sequence it uses is matched to the sequence of the strain that is causing the current epidemic.

The immunity induced by the Ebola GP vaccine is "more robust" than that offered by vaccines being deployed in the field, Glenn said. In a nonhuman primate challenge, the vaccine provoked the creation of "high-quality antibodies" and lots of them. It also requires a very low dose due to its adjuvant, Matrix-M.

The smaller dose, coupled with Novavax's capacity to produce millions of doses each month, could make it a key player in the Ebola vaccine arena. Early data from Glaxo's trial suggest that a single dose of its candidate may not trigger an immune response strong enough to fend off Ebola.

"[Novavax's] goal is to accelerate the development of this vaccine through funding collaborations with any one of a number of global healthcare entities or U.S. governmental entities," said Barclay "Buck" Phillips, Novavax chief financial officer.
Results from the trial are expected in mid-2015.

- here's the release

Special Reports: 10 drugs that could stop Ebola | The top 5 vaccine makers by 2013 revenue - Merck - GlaxoSmithKline

Related Articles:
First batch of GSK/NIH Ebola candidate shipped for Phase III trial in Liberia
J&J forms consortia to accelerate Ebola vaccine development, gets €100M boost from IMI
Johnson & Johnson is third to bring Ebola vaccine to trials, but is it too late?
Swiss trial of Merck/NewLink Ebola vaccine resumes at lower dose
Ebola vaccine makers Merck, GSK, J&J get legal protections in U.S. thanks to HHS declaration
Ebola update: Novavax testing nanoparticle jab, Glaxo gets EMA's advice