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Novacta Biosystems Receives £3.2m Wellcome Trust Award

Novacta Biosystems Limited, the anti-infective therapeutics company established by PBL and the John Innes Centre has won a £3.2M award from the Wellcome Trust, the world's largest medical charity. Novacta will use the award to progress development of a drug which, it is hoped, will help combat hospital-based *Clostridium difficile* (*C.difficile*) infections.

C.difficile infections (CDIs) are a growing and serious problem and have, for example, been associated with twice as many deaths in UK hospitals last year as MRSA. Cases of *C.difficile* infections, which occur in the lower digestive tract, rose by 22 per cent in the past year and affected more than 15,500 people over 65 in the first quarter of 2007. New anti-infective drugs are needed to target *C.difficile* without depleting other beneficial bacteria in the gut.

Novacta is developing novel, naturally-derived products known as "lantibiotics" as potential drugs for treating hospital acquired infections caused by *C.difficile*. Early preclinical data show promise for an effective treatment for CDI, acting selectively to kill *C.difficile* with less disturbance of normal gut bacteria than seen with existing drugs. Novacta will use the Wellcome Trust Strategic Translational award to progress its preclinical drug candidates into human clinical studies.

Dr Ted Bianco, Director of Technology Transfer at the Wellcome Trust, said "It is ironic that the current rise in *C.difficile* infections owes much to the widespread use of broad spectrum antibiotics. We need to be smarter in how we deploy our existing medicines and how we develop new treatments. Novacta should be applauded for its efforts to move away from carpet bombing our microbial flora in favour of precision targeting of the *C.difficile* bacterium."

Dr Mike Dawson, Novacta's Chief Scientific Officer, commented, "We are encouraged by early preclinical results which show potential for a much more selective approach to treat CDI. The Trust's support will enable us to complete preclinical development and to conduct a Phase I clinical trial to establish safety and tolerability in humans."

Dr Tony Sedgwick, Novacta's Chief Executive Officer, commented, "We are delighted that the Wellcome Trust has recognised our work in the area of lantibiotic drugs for the treatment of CDI. We are now positioned to evaluate the clinical potential of our programme, while we continue to build our product pipeline for other therapeutic indications."