

Interview in SCRIP March 2009

# Tackling PMDD/PMS head on

**Karin Ekberg**, CEO of Umecrine Mood, introduces the company's candidate drug and first-in-class compound aimed at preventing symptoms associated with premenstrual dysphoric disorder and premenstrual syndrome.

## **Q. How are premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) and premenstrual syndrome (PMS) currently treated?**

There is a distinct lack of targeted solutions in this area. Symptoms of PMDD, and its milder form PMS, range from severe cyclic depression, irritability and mood lability to abdominal pain, breast tenderness, headaches and fatigue. Current treatments tend to focus on alleviating particular symptoms, for example with the use of antidepressants or certain oral contraceptives. It's surprising that there isn't more research going on in this field as PMDD affects something like 3-10% of all menstruating women and severe PMS around 20%.

## **Q. So what approach is Umecrine Mood taking?**

We're looking at the specific biochemical process within the CNS associated with the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle. The occurrence of negative mood symptoms is related to an increase in levels of progesterone, or more specifically its metabolite, allopregnanolone. This is a GABA-steroid that acts on the GABAA receptor in the emotional centre of the brain. We are developing a unique and novel treatment based on inhibition of this specific GABA-steroid action. This will, to our knowledge, be the first drug developed specifically for PMDD.

## **Q. How advanced is this project?**

We already have several newly discovered lead compounds. In preclinical tests we have demonstrated inhibition of an allopregnanolone-induced effect on the GABAA receptor. Importantly, the compounds have no influence on the effects of other GABAA receptor active substances, including GABA itself. This means the inhibitory activity is specific and, therefore, in terms of being a potential pharmaceutical there is a low risk of severe side-effects.

We have also selected a candidate drug, comprising a first-in-class compound and a non-hormonal selective GABAA receptor modulator. Recent clinical results have demonstrated inhibition of allopregnanolone-induced effects on a biomarker of PMDD.

## **Q. What news flow can we expect to see for Umecrine Mood in the next 12 months?**

Results to date support the possible therapeutic effect of our candidate drug. The major event for 2009 will be the start of a Phase II study. This should demonstrate proof-of-concept and will mean we can intensify our efforts in finding a strategic partner. Ultimately, we are aiming to license out the project, enter into a co-development agreement with a partner or to secure an M&A transaction.

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