

Braunschweig, 28. September 2020

Innovation Award of the State of Lower Saxony for CORAT Consortium for the collaborative fast track development of COVID-19 antibodies

One of this year's three Innovation Awards in Lower Saxony was awarded to the CORAT consortium, a cooperation between Braunschweig University and YUMAB GmbH. The prize acknowledges the collaborative fast track development of COVID-19 antibodies and is endowed with 20,000 Euros. The Award was presented by Lower Saxony's Minister of Economics Dr. Bernd Althusmann, Lower Saxony's Minister of Science Björn Thümler and the chairman of the Innovation Network Lower Saxony Prof. Josef von Helden on September 28, 2020.

The immune system of most people has not yet developed antibodies against the novel SARS-CoV-2 virus. Therapeutic antibodies may cure a COVID-19 infection, thereby saving lives or provide protection against infection as passive immunization until the immune system has produced its own antibodies. This is where the research of the Corona Antibody Team (CORAT) initiated by YUMAB and the Institute of Biochemistry, Biotechnology and Bioinformatics at the Braunschweig University started. The scientists of both institutions have contributed significantly to the development of methods for the biotechnological production of human antibodies in the test tube (in vitro) and have conducted research on neutralizing antibodies against the virus.

CORAT is an association of scientists and industrial partners. It combines the competencies in Lower Saxony to develop an antibody drug against COVID-19. "We have a drug candidate in less time than ever before and are close to clinical trials. This was only possible thanks to the extraordinary commitment and excellent cooperation of all involved," says Professor Michael Hust from the Institute of Biochemistry, Biotechnology and Bioinformatics and YUMAB Co-founder. The next step is to enter clinical trials at the beginning of 2021.

In addition to YUMAB and Braunschweig University, the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) and the Fraunhofer ITEM are also involved in the development of the novel drug. The cooperation led to the foundation of CORAT Therapeutics GmbH as a spin out of YUMAB, which bundles the further development of the antibody drug and drives it forward with the support of the State of Lower Saxony and in close consultation with the regulatory authorities.

Dr. Thomas Schirrmann, CEO of YUMAB and founding CEO of CORAT Therapeutics GmbH comments: "Our state government in Lower Saxony recognized very early that there is an urgent need for directly curative drugs – in addition to vaccines as a precaution – for acutely infected COVID-19 patients. Virus-neutralizing antibodies do not only stop the virus, but unlike active vaccines they also enable immediate protection of high-risk groups or exposed medical personnel as a passive immunization. In addition to our research, many more people have supported us to find a COVID-19 cure as quickly as possible – we would like to thank all of them – but especially our private investors in Braunschweig and the NBank".

Prof. Dübel, Head of the Department of Biotechnology at Braunschweig University, CORAT initiator and YUMAB co-founder, adds: "Without the truly extraordinary commitment of our doctoral students, the scientific and technical staff, as well as our employees, who have dispensed with weekends and public holidays for months, we would not have reached this point. For me, they are all the real prize winners today!"

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