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MPEG LA builds new biotech licensing programmes and remains hopeful on CRISPR pool

Last year, *IAM* [spoke](#) to Kristin Neuman, MPEG LA's Executive Director, Biotechnology, about its ongoing initiative to launch a CRISPR-Cas9 patent pool. We've now caught up with her to talk about the organisation's other major biotech project – Increscent Therapeutics – and her thoughts about the future of patent licensing in the life sciences

[Increscent Therapeutics](#) is unlike most of MPEG LA's other programmes, both in the sense that it concerns biotechnology and in that it is not a patent pool, explains Neuman: "It is a technological platform which we developed here at MPEG LA with our internal biotech people, working with some consultant as well as a contract research organisation in Germany, which specialises in oligonucleotides therapeutics."

A drug development and design platform, it is intended to help biopharma innovators to create cell-targeting oligonucleotides. It is claimed that Increscent can be used to produce improved therapeutics for existing targets in the liver, as well as a range of targets which could not previously be pinpointed by oligonucleotides.

"We have developed an IP portfolio around Increscent," Neuman comments. "We are now marketing the technology and actively looking for collaborations. Our licensing strategy for Increscent is typical of a small biotech company. We

are willing to license this non-exclusively, or exclusively for given fields of use.”

While initial aspects of the technology have been available for license since 2016, innovation has continued since then and Increscent has been ahead of its time until very recently, she states: “The field now wants to make conjugates that can target tissues other than the liver – and Increscent is a way to do that.”

Neuman adds that MPEG LA is currently in contact with several pharma companies regarding potential royalty-free licences for the use of Increscent Therapeutics for this purpose of developing potential oligonucleotide treatments for covid-19.

Drug development platforms

Modular drug development and delivery platforms have been growing in commercial importance to the life sciences industry in recent times, reflecting changes in biotechnology and the need for more efficient ways of discovering new therapeutics.

Last year, biotech IP expert and New York Law School professor Jacob Sherkow [told IAM](#): “From my perspective I think that value these days is all about the platform, as usually demonstrated by a single successful approval. It seems like the trick is: develop a platform that can be simply modulated (by, for example, using different target nucleotides), get one approval to demonstrate proof-of-concept, and ramp things up. You will get more throughput than by taking stabs in the dark at single molecules.”

In 2019, Spark Therapeutics attracted a \$4.3 billion buyout by Roche after its Adeno-Associated Viral vector platform produced the first FDA-approved haemophilia gene therapy. The previous year Biogen paid \$1 billion to Ionis for a 10-year partnership to develop gene-therapies using the latter’s antisense platform. And Skyhawk Therapeutics is another company to have struck [a string of deals](#) with leading biopharma companies to develop drug targets in particular therapeutic areas.

But MPEG LA’s Increscent programme does not originate from a strategic decision to get into this space. “This came about organically,” Neuman explains. “We learned about this [technological] field when acting as a licensing agent in the field of siRNA. We happened to have the right cluster of people in the organisation to dig into this technology deeply, to discover the problems and come up with the solutions.”

Neuman says she does not know whether MPEG LA is looking to make this into a regular business model but observes it this project in its current form. “Given the expertise in licensing that we have here, it was a natural development,” she states.

The Increscent programme certainly shows the organisation’s openness to other forms of patent licensing. If it proves successful, it is easy to imagine similar projects in the future. Increscent also illustrates how developments in biotechnology are shaking up patterns of IP value creation.

CRISPR-Cas9 and other biotech patent pools

MPEG LA is also expanding its patent pooling activities into the life sciences. Its other major biotech project is its CRISPR-Cas9 initiative, which aims to provide one-stop patent licences for companies seeking to use the revolutionary gene-editing technology. This could prove especially useful given the complex and multi-layered nature of the Cas9 IP landscape.

[Proposed](#) in 2017, this potential pool has [gained the support](#) of major rights holders, such as the Broad Institute. However, with the [hotly-contested patent dispute](#) over fundamental Cas9 rights still ongoing between the Broad and fellow innovator the University of California, MPEG LA’s pool is not yet in a position to launch.

Nevertheless, Neuman is hopeful for progress on this front in the next year or so. “I think that in 2021 we may have more clarity as to priority rights among the earliest CRISPR patent filers, which may incentivize additional key patent holders to join MPEG LA’s CRISPR patent pool initiative,” she says.

Neuman also thinks that patent pools could be successful in other areas of biotechnology. “I believe it will just take one successful pool to show the way,” she claims.

“There are fewer platform technologies in biopharma and biotech when compared to the high-tech industry, for example,” she notes, adding that the life sciences lack the rigid technological standards found in consumer electronics. “But where you have biotech platform technologies, a patent pool can make abundant sense. So there is a role for MPEG LA to play with technologies like CRISPR.”

Neuman adds that it is even possible that we will see a patent pool relating to covid-19. “If there were to arise a particular class of drugs to treat covid-19 or a vaccine technology platform, then you could imagine a pool might be successful,” she suggests. “This could help in licensing IP large to large numbers of manufacturers or distributors.”

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