GlaxoSmithKline and University of California, San Francisco win MMV’s Project of the Year award

Falcipain project takes top honours
MMV announced the winner of its Project of the Year award on 29 May 2005 at its 5th Annual Stakeholders’ Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. Professor Pornchai Matangkasombut, President of Mahidol University presented the award to falcipain project team representatives, José Fiandor of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Philip Rosenthal of the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). The two accepted the award on behalf of their teammates at the GSK Diseases of the Developing World Drug Discovery Unit in Tres Cantos, Spain, at GSK, USA and at UCSF.

GSK was part of the winning team for the second consecutive year. The falcipain project is one of three projects in the GSK/MMV ‘mini-portfolio’ research collaboration (agreed in June 2003), focused on discovering new compounds with promising antimalarial activity. Last year the 4(1H)-pyridones project, also part of the mini-portfolio won the award and its drug candidate is now progressing through preclinical development.

MMV’s Expert Scientific Advisory Committee (ESAC) selected the falcipain project for its progress from lead identification to lead optimization. By the end of 2004, the project team had discovered a novel class of compounds with good potency, pharmacokinetics and potential low cost of goods.

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Mahidol University welcomes MMV stakeholders to Bangkok

The number of reported malaria cases in Thailand has decreased significantly since 1999, and total cases are few compared with those of Mozambique, the site of MMV’s last stakeholders’ meeting (>5 million cases in 2003). This year MMV’s choice to hold its 5th Annual Stakeholders’ Meeting in Bangkok centred on the fact that several of MMV’s important clinical trials are in progress at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University, including the Phase II trial for the OZ277/RBx11160 (synthetic peroxide) project.

One of MMV’s key collaborators at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine is Professor Somchai Loareesuwan, former Dean of the Faculty and a member of MMV’s Expert Scientific Advisory Committee (ESAC) from 1999 to 2004.

Malaria in Thailand
- 37,355 laboratory confirmed cases (2003)
- 325 deaths (2003)
- most prevalent along international borders and forested areas

(World Malaria Report, 2005, p. 195)

A malaria free world: through the eyes of children

Drawing contest in Thailand

Winners of the drawing contest (from left to right): Taem I-La, Suliporn, Apichart Sinchuai, Wipawadee Moomsang and Busba Boon-On with (in back row) Professor Sornchai Loareesuwon; the Director of Rujiraphat School; Dean Pratap Singhasivanon; Dame Bridget Ogilvie; Dr Chris Hentschel and Dr Pascoal Mocumbi.

The malaria drawing contest held in 2004 in Maputo, Mozambique at the time of MMV’s stakeholders’ meeting had been a success, not only in forging links with the local community but in providing original artwork to grace the pages of MMV’s annual report.

The team at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine in Bangkok was keen to carry on this new tradition and immediately took up the idea of holding a drawing contest in 2005. In Thailand, malaria is a threat mainly in rural areas, particularly those bordering Myanmar. Having already planned a day trip to the Ratchaburi Province to visit the RTIC field station and Suan Phung District Hospital (see page 1), Dean Pratap Singhasivanon suggested concentrating the drawing contest on eight schools in that area.

More than 500 children from grade four to grade six were asked to draw their vision of a malaria free world. When the MMV team arrived to help choose the winning drawings they were greeted with an outpouring of colour, optimism for a better world without malaria and clear evidence of a strong health education programme that teaches even the youngest children how to fight malaria.

This year, MMV stakeholders were able to join in the joy and celebration of the drawing contest award ceremony held on 30 May at the Rujiraphat School. Beautiful young dancers representing the Karen origins of many of the local people, performed to the accompaniment of traditional instruments. Dame Bridget Ogilvie, Chair of MMV’s Board of Directors, awarded the five talented young artists with a backpack of art supplies. Each participating school also received a set of sports equipment.

Dance and music opened the award ceremony on 30 May 2005.

Young students at the Rujiraphat School listen to the drawing contest award presentations.

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Mahidol University welcomes MMV stakeholders to Bangkok

Professor Sornchai is the principal investigator for a number of antimalarial clinical trials, including MMV's at Mahidol and at other research facilities in Thailand. When MMV suggested that the stakeholders’ meeting be held in Bangkok he enthusiastically accepted and enlisted the full support of Dean Pratap Singhasivanon, current head of Mahidol's Faculty of Tropical Medicine.

A warm welcome awaited the MMV team and stakeholders' in Bangkok. The meeting opened on 28 May 2005 with a tour of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine. The visit included the men and women's malaria wards where patients enrolled in antimalarial clinical trials receive treatment; a stop in the Intensive Care Unit to observe a patient suffering from severe malaria; and concluded with a look at the well-equipped malaria diagnostics laboratory.

On 29 May, the MMV management team presented MMV's progress to the stakeholders. The Faculty of Tropical Medicine co-hosted the Official Dinner that evening. MMV was honoured to have the President of Mahidol University, Professor Pornchai Matangkasombut preside over the dinner and present the Project of the Year award (see page 1). The keynote speaker at the dinner was Professor Robert W. Snow, Professor of Tropical Public Health, University of Oxford and Kenya Medical Research Institute, Nairobi, who addressed "The Burden of Malaria Worldwide."

On 30 May, MMV stakeholders visited the Rajanagarindra Tropical Disease International Centre (RTIC) in the Suan Phung District, Ratchaburi Province on the western border of Thailand. RTIC is one of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine’s field stations for conducting research on tropical diseases. The Centre also provides health services to the local population and field epidemiology training for students.

A special highlight of the stakeholders' meeting was the drawing contest awards ceremony which took place at the Rujiraphat School, near the RTIC (see above). The visit to Ratchaburi Province, and the stakeholders’ meeting, concluded with a guided tour of Suan Phung District Hospital.
The smiles on everyone’s faces – from the smallest child receiving an MMV cap from Dr Mocumbi to the GSK Project of the Year team who joined the MMV stakeholders for the event – were clear evidence that in the absence of a common spoken language, art and music can help to celebrate a shared goal: *Curing Malaria Together.*

**Pictures that speak for themselves**

A clean environment helps to fight disease and keep her “School Free from Malaria.” This drawing is by Suliporn of the Sin Rae Siam School.

Very special thanks to the children and teachers of Rujiraphat School, Klum-nakkhaoying II School, Thammasart-Chula II School, Baan Huay Phag School, Baan Suan Phung School, Wat Rangsanenakhonchan School, Sin Rae Siam School and Baan Tha Ma Kham School.

Special thanks to Dean Pratap Singhasivanon, Professor Sornchai Looreesuwan, Vimolsri Panichyanon, Dr Sandra B. Tempongko, Ms Porntepin Sooksaengprasit, Asst. Professor Phanorsir Attanath and all support staff at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine who helped make MMV’s meeting in Bangkok a success.
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Falcipains are cysteine proteases that, along with other enzymes, enable the malaria parasite to use human haemoglobin from the red blood cell for its own development. Falcipain inhibitors block this process and thereby kill malaria parasites. In 2005, the team’s objective is to address selectivity, resistance and preliminary toxicology issues, with the aim to have a number of candidate compounds from which a drug candidate can be selected. For more information on this project visit www.mmv.org at MMV Projects.

MMV project collaborators gathered on 29 May 2005 at the stakeholders’ meeting (from left to right): Federico Gomez de las Heras (GSK Tres Cantos); Amparo Lago (GSK USA); David Pompliano (GSK USA); José Fiandor (GSK Tres Cantos); Philip Rosenthal (UCSF); Domingo Gargallo (GSK Tres Cantos); Jiri Gut (UCSF); José Coteron (GSK Tres Cantos).