Vir Biotechnology Launches to Cure, Treat, and Prevent Challenging Infectious Diseases Using Latest Advances in Immunology

January 5, 2017

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. – January 5, 2017 – Vir Biotechnology, Inc. today announced it is launching to develop cures, treatments, and preventions for challenging infectious diseases, with former Biogen CEO George Scangos heading a team of scientific and industry leaders. The company will be headquartered in the San Francisco, California, area and will seek to apply immune programming at an unprecedented scale.

Vir brings together cutting-edge innovations with leading scientific expertise and management to take on some of the world's most challenging infectious diseases for which solutions are non-existent or inadequate. Vir seeks to take a new approach, using breakthroughs in immune programming to manipulate pathogen-host interactions. The company will take a multi-program, multi-platform approach to applying these breakthroughs, guided by rigorous science and driven by medical need.

Lead investors include ARCH Venture Partners and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and will be joined by others including sovereign wealth funds, public mutual funds and prominent individuals and family offices. ARCH Venture Partners, whose co-founder Robert Nelsen conceived and led the formation of Vir, has itself committed to invest $150 million.

"The scale and scope we envision for Vir will allow us to fund targeted academic research, ramp our own research and development efforts, and write individual checks of up to $100 million to in-license innovative technology platforms and novel clinical assets from biotech and pharmaceutical companies," said ARCH Managing Director and Vir founder Robert Nelsen.

In addition to veteran CEO George Scangos, former Vertex Pharmaceuticals president and Biogen Vice President of Research and Scientific Board member Vicki Sato will provide leadership as Chairman of the Board. Vir's Directors include ARCH Venture Partners' Robert Nelsen and Kristina Burow; Klaus Frueh, Ph.D.; and Bob More. Phillip A. Sharp, Ph.D.; Tom Daniel, M.D. and Rob Perez are expected to join the Board. Scientific Advisors include renowned scientists Larry Corey M.D.; Jeff Bluestone, Ph.D.; Emilio Emini, Ph.D.; and Louis J. Picker, M.D.

"The opportunity to lead Vir is one I could not pass up. There is a tremendous global need for effective therapies and preventions for infectious diseases of considerable public health importance. Success would mean alleviation of a lot of human suffering as well as meaningful financial returns for Vir investors. The science has matured to a point where exciting new approaches are at hand, and there is a need for a company to pursue those approaches with excellence, critical mass and scale. Vir is that company, and I am very excited to take on a leadership role," said incoming Vir CEO George Scangos.

As a leading supporter of research into infectious diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is a natural partner in developing innovative technologies for disease prevention and treatment of global health challenges that afflict the poorest segments of the population. The foundation uses program-related investments to engage the resources and expertise of the private sector for the benefit of those most in need.

"Tremendous innovation is needed to control and potentially cure infectious diseases, including those that disproportionately affect the poorest people. Vir is a unique partnership that will allow us to leverage novel technologies to address these unmet needs together," said Bill Gates.

Chronic and acute infections impact hundreds of millions of people every year. For example, according to the World Health Organization, there are about 240 million people in the world living with chronic Hepatitis B, with millions of new infections annually. Millions contract seasonal influenza, resulting in three to five million severe cases and between 250,000 and 500,000 deaths. Tuberculosis is one of the leading causes of death globally—two billion have latent infection and ten million new cases occur annually. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, antibiotic resistant bacteria infect at least two million people and cause 23,000 deaths annually in the United States alone.

Vir is adopting a broad technological portfolio, including the viral vectors obtained through the acquisition of TomegaVax, Inc. These technologies were originally developed by a team at Oregon Health & Science University, led by Louis Picker and Klaus Frueh, both grantees of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Vir's own laboratory work is expected to take place in San Francisco, Boston and Portland, Oregon.

About Vir

Vir Biotechnology is investing in cures, treatments, and preventions for challenging viral and bacterial diseases, including those caused by drug-resistant bacteria and emerging pathogens. The company was created by ARCH Venture Partners and will be supported by a diverse consortium of long-term investors, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, sovereign wealth funds, public mutual funds, and prominent individuals and family offices.

To learn more, visit www.vir.bio