

Roquefort enlists Nobel prizewinner Sir Martin Evans

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Roquefort Therapeutics, a specialist in cancer treatments, has appointed a Nobel prizewinner as its chief scientific officer.

Sir Martin Evans has joined Roquefort after it acquired Oncogeni, a company he co-founded and that has developed two cell and cancer medicines. Evans, 81, was the first scientist to identify embryonic stem cells, which are adapted for a variety of medical purposes. He was one of three scientists awarded the Nobel prize for medicine in 2007. Roquefort's two existing drug candidates seek to block a protein called Midkine, which is more heavily produced in adults suffering with cancer and has been shown to cause cancer treatments to become less effective, particularly in those in later stages of the illness.

Research has shown that blocking Midkine can stop cancerous tumours multiplying. Oncogeni has developed two treatments, one engineered to kill cancer directly and by enhancing the activity of natural killer cells and another designed to kill solid tumours.

Also joining Roquefort from Oncogeni are its co-founder Ajan Reginald, 50, a former global head of emerging technologies for Roche Group and chief operating officer and

chief technology officer of Novacyt, who will become chief executive, and Darrin Disley, 55, who will be a non-executive director.

Disley, 55, is the former boss of the gene editing company Horizon Discovery, who led the company from start-up through to a \$113 million flotation on London's junior Aim market in 2014.

The company was taken over by PerkinElmer in 2020 for \$383 million.

Stephen West, the executive chairman at Roquefort, said: "We are building a world-class team with a proven track record in drug development who will help drive innovation and ultimately value in our exciting portfolio of oncology drugs.

"Sir Martin Evans is a pioneer in stem cells and DNA research and his experience will be incredibly valuable as group chief scientific officer throughout our preclinical studies. Ajan Reginald's experience in commercialisation both within big pharma and in biotech will be invaluable as chief executive as we look to achieve value in this high growth segment of life sciences. Dr Darrin Disley is a great addition as non-executive director, and his expertise in fundraising and value creation is incredibly complementary to our existing board of directors."

Roquefort hopes to bring its lead drug candidate to clinical trials in the second half of next year, without raising any more cash from investors, or licence the treatments out to a larger pharmaceutical group.

Roquefort suffered a £917,000 operating loss last year. Its shares rose by 5 per cent to just under 8p last night.