

Ali Mobasher and collaborators from the University of Oulu are successful recipients of funding from Horizon Europe

Ali Mobasher, Professor of Musculoskeletal Biology in the Fibrobesity theme is a member of a new European consortium that has been successful with funding from the Horizon Europe program.



Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis worldwide. Chronic low-grade inflammation in the intra-articular environment causes cartilage degeneration at an early disease stage, resulting in chronic pain, disability, and loss of independence due to progressive joint destruction. There are currently no effective treatments available to treat OA and control the low-grade inflammation in early-stage OA patients. There is evidence that altered biomechanics contributes to intra-articular inflammation and facilitates OA development in specific patient subgroups.

In this Horizon Europe project, the PROTO consortium will treat early-stage knee OA patients with local intra-articular injections of placental stromal cells (PLX-PAD). This is a novel allogeneic cell therapy product with distinct anti-inflammatory properties and the potential to halt or revert disease progression. The PROTO consortium intends to apply this novel cell therapy developed by Pluristem Ltd. in Haifa, Israel to prevent disease progression in OA by reducing joint inflammation, restoring physiological homeostasis, and facilitating articulation and movement. This will be the first application of PLX-PAD as an intra-articular injection in the knees of early OA patients.

Targeting this 'window of opportunity' will fundamentally change the way OA is diagnosed and treated today and in the future.

The PROTO concept was developed following the success of the HIPGEN project, a multicenter phase III trial sponsored by the European Commission in the Horizon 2020 program (<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/779293>).

The PROTO consortium is led by Professor **Tobias Winkler**, MD, Ph.D., Head of Musculoskeletal Advanced Therapies at the Julius Wolff Institute Center for Musculoskeletal Surgery at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Germany. The project and consortium will be managed by Innovation Acta S.R.L. in Rome, Italy. The University of Oulu's allocated budget for this project will be € 527,500 and the project will fund a Post Doctoral Researcher and a Doctoral Researcher.

Horizon Europe (HORIZON)

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Project: 101095635 — PROTO - Advanced PeRsOnalized Therapies for Osteoarthritis – TACKLING INFLAMMATION TO IMPROVE PATIENT OUTCOMES.