

Changes are flowing at Charles River Labs

By Mia Burns

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Charles River Laboratories International, Inc. is buzzing with business investments, the addition of a seasoned industry veteran, and new therapeutics models and marketing agreements. Michael Luther has joined Charles River as corporate VP, global discovery research services. In addition, Charles River has announced a global sales and marketing agreement to promote and sell ImaBiotech quantitative mass spectrometry imaging services to the pharmaceutical and biotech industries as part of the company's preclinical services. The company is confident in the growth of discovery outsourcing and acquired Piedmont Research Center, LLC and Cerebricon Ltd. in 2009.

Luther holds more than 30 years of life sciences experience under his belt. As an experienced drug discovery scientist, he has a proven track record for establishing, leading, and managing life science organizations. Most recently, Luther was president of the David H. Murdock Research Institute. Prior to that position, he was the VP of basic research and site head at Merck Frosst Centre for Therapeutic Research in Montreal. Before Merck, Luther spent more than 15 years at GlaxoSmithKline in numerous positions, one of which was VP of discovery research.

"We are on the front end of the drug development," Luther told *R&D Business Pharma Connect*. "In other words, it is the part where you say, 'Is this idea that I want to invest in? How do I validate it as an area for further investment? How do I find that early molecule, whether it be a small molecule compound biologic, meaning a vaccine or an antibody protein therapy, and how do we access whether or not it is functional in an appropriate disease or biological setting that is relevant to the human condition that gives us confidence that we want to invest more and take it further for safety testing and even the clinical development terms of a Phase I, Phase II program.'"

Currently, the pharmaceutical industry is standing within a unique time, Luther says. "The business model in biopharma is changing," Luther told *R&D Business Pharma Connect*. "It is adapting. The old adage is that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results, and we realize that we have to do things differently."

The company is developing translational disease models in major therapeutic areas to meet client needs. In the fall, Charles River will introduce four new pain models: behavioral, neuropathic, inflammatory, and chronic joint. One of the models is a rat monoiodoacetate model for osteoarthritis and chronic joint pain. This model was designed in combination with a dynamic weight bearing measurement system to gather more clinically relevant data and also mimics the symptoms of osteoarthritis. By using a pressure-sensitive sensor mat and video imaging, Charles River scientists can observe how investigational compounds impact joint pain by measuring changes to the rat's movement, similar to observing how a person with a sore joint favors the less painful limb.

"We know that a mouse or rat is not a human," Luther says. "Clearly, what we are looking to do is how do we bring clinical insights and clinical findings around human disease, human pathophysiology, to the various models and read outs that we have in our preclinical setting so that with higher confidence, it may not be 100 percent, but with increased confidence that the decisions that we are making are the decisions that will help our partners make the best decision."

Regarding label-free mass spectrometry imaging, the technique brings a new approach to drug discovery and preclinical development, with the possibility of getting valuable drug distribution information early, without labeling the test compounds. This technique can be qualitative and quantitative, and allow the simultaneous localization of the parent compound and its metabolites, as well as the localization of endogenous metabolites of interest.

"Being able to do label free detection methodology it is simpler, it is more cost effective and obviously, if you are able to detect it gives you greater confidence in that you are actually measuring the entity that you are actually pursuing," Luther told *R&D Business Pharma Connect*.