ICON Survey Highlights Scale of Focus on Precision Therapies in Increasingly Complex Oncology Landscape

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Collaboration with industry partners critical to support effective translation of new therapeutic approaches to the clinic

DUBLIN--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Sep. 12, 2024-- ICON plc, (NASDAQ: ICLR) a world-leading clinical research organisation powered by healthcare intelligence, today announced results from a recent survey of over 100 professionals engaged in oncology drug development to understand the current state of emerging oncology treatment development, including the associated clinical trial dynamics. Respondents acknowledged that much focus has been accorded to emerging oncology treatments; however, as of yet, there are varied views on the degree to which these precision approaches will improve patient outcomes.

Significant investment is made in cancer research globally each year, with a total investment of approximately US$24·5 billion from 2016 to 2020[1]. The growing understanding of the intricacies underlying various types of cancers has generated many new biological approaches to cancer treatment, such as both mRNA and non-mRNA-based vaccines, oncolytic virus therapy, CAR T-cell or NK cell therapy. Many of these emerging modalities have subsequently entered increasingly complex clinical trials and a crowded, precision-dominated landscape.

The influx of innovative therapies for oncology has not resulted in a singular therapeutic breakthrough. Instead, an increasingly crowded market of oncology therapeutics has emerged, and oncology therapeutic developers are investing in this diversity.

In line with this, 85% of all survey respondents reported having more than one therapeutic approach in development. Additionally, 68% of respondents reported testing at least one combination therapy.

The survey findings indicated that respondents have varied views on the impact of these treatments on patient outcomes at this stage in their development journey. Over a third of respondents, 37%, were optimistic that patients would fare much better in the future than they do now. A similar cohort, 43%, reported that patient outcomes were likely to see modest or minimal improvement. One in five respondents predicted that patient outcomes would not improve. These findings likely reflect that oncologists are using new therapies in a staggered approach, rather than a single new treatment, and time is required to determine the impact they will have.

Andreas Dreps, Senior Vice President and Head of Oncology and Immunology Drug Development at ICON, commented, *"Encouragingly, this survey illustrates the continued investment sponsors are making to develop new oncology treatments. The outlook with regards to future impact is varied given considerations around stage of development, likely clinical benefit, treatment accessibility, and implementation into current standard of care treatments. With the number of potential therapy combinations rising, identifying the optimal combination of therapeutic modalities poses challenges. This emphasises the need for robust clinical development programs that address the complexity sponsors face – from a scientific, regulatory and commercial perspective."*

Whilst site selection and phase 2 or 3 stage development were commonly cited as key R&D challenges, respondents were equally willing to suggest ways to improve drug development: predictive biomarkers (47%), innovative clinical trial designs (42%), and early biomarker identification (41%) were the top three.

Chris Smyth, President of ICON Biotech, commented, *"Biotechs play an important role in driving the field of oncology therapeutics forward. An increasingly diverse, sophisticated and crowded landscape drives the complexity in clinical development and commercialisation. Partnership and collaboration will be critical to navigating these challenges. At ICON, we serve as an end-to-end partner to support the effective translation of these therapeutic approaches to the clinic."*

Producing successful oncology treatments that use these emerging modalities has presented unique considerations. In its new whitepaper, "De-risking clinical development of precision medicines in oncology", ICON highlights how oncology therapeutic developers can adapt to this highly competitive market and streamline development through the employment of AI, facilitating collaboration between partners, vendors and trial sites, innovative trial designs, and the integration of predictive biomarkers.

For further information please visit ICONplc.com/precision-medicine-in-oncology.

About ICON plc

ICON plc is a world-leading healthcare intelligence and clinical research organisation. From molecule to medicine, we advance clinical research providing outsourced services to pharmaceutical, biotechnology, medical device and government and public health organisations. We develop new innovations, drive emerging therapies forward and improve patient lives. With headquarters in Dublin, Ireland, ICON employed approximately 41,100 employees in 97 locations in 55 countries as at June 30, 2024. For further information about ICON, visit: www.iconplc.com.

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1. Global funding for cancer research between 2016 and 2020: a content analysis of public and philanthropic investments. McIntosh, Stuart A et al. The Lancet Oncology, Volume 24, Issue 6, 636 - 645

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