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Instituto de Medicina Molecular receives phase II Grand Challenges Explorations Funding

[Lisbon] – Instituto de Medicina Molecular (IMM) announced today that it will receive Phase II funding through [Grand Challenges Explorations](#) (GCE), an initiative created by the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) that enables individuals worldwide to test bold ideas to address persistent health and development challenges. Miguel Prudêncio, group leader at Instituto de Medicina Molecular, and his team will continue to pursue an innovative global health research project, titled “A New Whole-Organism Vaccine Against Malaria”.

“This funding is of great importance since it will enable us to perform necessary pre-clinical experiments and seek regulatory authorization to carry out clinical trials with our malaria vaccine candidate”, said Miguel Prudêncio, Group Leader at IMM and principal investigator of the project. “It is the first time that a Phase II GCE research grant, which translates into a funding of US \$1.218.000,00, is awarded in Portugal”, concluded Miguel Prudêncio.

Miguel Prudêncio was awarded a Phase I GCE grant in 2010 to establish the proof-of-principle of an innovative idea for a vaccine against malaria. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s GCE Phase II grants recognize projects that have successfully completed their Phase I objectives and allocate further funding to extend the findings from Phase I. These grants seek to engage individuals worldwide who can apply innovative approaches to some of the world’s toughest and persistent global health and development challenges. GCE invests in early stage ideas that have the potential to help bring people out of poverty and realize their human potential.

Miguel Prudêncio project is one of the Phase II Grand Challenges Explorations grant awardees announced today.

According to António Mendes, the post-doctoral researcher responsible for the experimental work carried out during Phase I, the immediate challenges are to ensure that the proposed work can be

carried out within the expected timeframe and to obtain results that enable the continuation of the project. “This is not a risk-free endeavor, but this funding enables us to start working immediately towards that objective. We have a lot of work ahead of us”, says António Mendes.

Miguel Prudêncio and his team at IMM aim to produce a whole-organism vaccine based on a malaria parasite - *Plasmodium berghei* - that only infects rodents and is unable to cause malaria in humans. Their idea is not only to harness the cross-species protective potential of this parasite but also to genetically modify it so it will express antigens of its human-infective counterparts, thereby teaching the human immune system to fight human malaria parasites. This is a high risk-high reward innovative approach that can potentially overcome several of the limitations faced by current malaria vaccination strategies.

About IMM

Instituto de Medicina Molecular (IMM) is a reference biomedical research centre in Portugal, having acquired the special status of Associate laboratory of the Portuguese Ministry of Science and Technology. IMM’s mission is to promote basic, translational and clinical biomedical research with the aim to understand the mechanisms of disease and develop novel therapeutic approaches. The recent creation of the Academic Medical Centre of Lisbon gathers in a single consortium the Institute of Molecular Medicine, The Faculty of Medicine of the University of Lisbon and the Hospital de Santa Maria with the aim of developing an integrated perspective of medicine, fostering the transversal biomedical research, from the bench to the clinic. More at: <http://www.imm.fm.ul.pt>

About Grand Challenges Explorations

[Grand Challenges Explorations](#) is a US\$100 million initiative funded by the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#). Launched in 2008, over 800 people in 50 countries have received Grand Challenges Explorations grants. The grant program is open to anyone from any discipline and from any organization. The initiative uses an agile, accelerated grant-making process with short two-page online application and no preliminary data required. Initial grants of US\$100,000 are awarded two times a year. Successful projects have the opportunity to receive a follow-on grant of up to US\$1 million.

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