

Interview: Jorg Janssen - Managing Director, Lygature, The Netherlands



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Lygature is the new name of TI Pharma and CTMM, two internationally renowned public-private-partnerships turned non-for-profit partnership drivers. Managing Director Jorg Janssen explains that it will be business as usual for the merged organization, but with more opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaborations than ever before. Lygature drives partnerships for the development of medical solutions for patients. This is the 'raison d'être' for our organization. What really sets us apart is how we manage partnerships from start to success to achieve our goals.

Top Institute Pharma (TI Pharma) and the Center for Translational Molecular Medicine (CTMM) are currently in the process of merging, and with the merger comes a new name 'Lygature', effective per January 1st, 2016. To begin, please introduce Lygature to our readers, and tell us how you will try to position this new entity in the Dutch life sciences industry?

Between 2010 and 2011, it became clear that the public funding for these two organizations would decrease substantially from a five year budget of EUR 300 million and EUR 280 million for CTMM and TI Pharma respectively. At that time we made a thorough analysis of the strengths and experience we had developed while organizing and driving complex public-private consortia. We

soon realized the importance of bringing together research, resources, expertise and knowledge from academic, not-for-profit, and private stakeholders to pursue projects that would otherwise not be possible. We could (or should) be the party in a consortium with no interest other than the success of the partnership. TI Pharma and CTMM both added value to consortia as a coordinating entity, and both organizations learned a lot from their failures and successes since they were created with support of the Dutch government in 2007. Finding this value became critical to the organizations' future.

So, while we are transitioning from TI Pharma and CTMM to Lygature, we are not starting from scratch, and we can only gain from combining the organizations' experience. We will continue to look for partnerships where we know we can deliver and work well together to help the group achieve its goals, with a particular focus on goals that can only be reached through collaboration. CTMM covered the areas of imaging and molecular diagnostics, while TI Pharma was specialized in early drug discovery and the commercialization of precision medicines. Lygature will now cover the entire spectrum in terms of content and will likely become even more specialized in managing broad scope and cross-disciplinary projects going forward.

As one example, in early September we issued a press release regarding an osteoarthritis project that we cofounded with the Innovative Medicines Initiative, one of the organizations that funds large partnerships, and this is a project that involved both diagnostic and drug development components.

What are some of the synergies or efficiencies that you have unlocked by merging?

One of our main added values as an organization are our employees and our program managers in particular. They are highly skilled and experienced researchers and professionals who have worked in both academia and industry. They know how to communicate, how to convince, how to involve people and how to run projects. But most importantly, they keep everyone focused on the ultimate goal: developing medical solutions for patients.

Since this merger-process began, we have had cross-discipline meetings on a regular basis, and now going forward our program managers can span an even broader scientific scope. Looking for synergies within the various projects that we run is one of our core responsibilities, and an excellent example of our added value.

One point is that CTMM used to work quite closely with (Dutch) health foundations, while TI Pharma had strong relationships with regulatory bodies; going forward, Lygature as a whole will benefit from these close relationships.

What is an example of Lygature working on the international stage?

The European Lead Factory is an example of a project in which seven large multinational pharmaceutical companies are collaborating; they are sharing their compound libraries with each other and the public through this partnership. There is also a small group of SMEs and academic groups are planning to add to this library. So far, we have more than 300 000 different compounds stored in this library, which is physically located in Scotland. Both the companies and public partners can screen their targets against the compounds in the library. This is definitely a new way to look towards drug discovery that increases the chances of finding new hits. It would be impossible to compile a library of this size without a large consortium, and an impartial party like Lygature is therefore necessary to the smooth and fair functioning and management of the initiative.

One of TI Pharma's 'cases for partnership' is resource sharing, which the European Lead Factory clearly falls under; what are some other examples of cases for partnership?

Another case is regulatory innovation; everyone wants faster and more efficient market access for new therapeutic solutions. We provide the neutral ground for various players to speak with each other and discuss new solutions based on science. There was a platform within TI Pharma that continues within Lygature called the Escher Platform, which seeks to bring about more efficient and effective regulatory systems by conducting and publishing relevant research. We have also launched a project with the EMA focused on the idea of adaptive regulatory pathways, and the challenges of setting up an adaptive regulatory system or structure.

What are Lygatures 'cases for partnership' going forward?

Lygature focuses on five different cases for partnerships; resource sharing, regulatory innovation, neglected diseases, patient engagement and data infrastructure initiatives. What really sets us apart is how we manage partnerships from start to success to achieve our goals.

This unique organization has a very specific purpose for innovative life sciences. As individuals, what are some of the specific skillsets and competencies you have created to manage these complex networks?

There needs to be a strong scientific background. There are many other organizations that run the administration of Public Private Partnerships, but we distinguish ourselves through our scientific expertise. We have scientific directors covering both areas of medicine and diagnostics, and experienced (industry) professionals in our core areas of partnership. This is really something to set

Lygature apart. The combination of capabilities to manage a project in the administrative sense, as well as the scientific content and communications aspect is also extremely important. We have only one goal in mind: the success of a partnership.. We are facilitators, the drivers of these partnerships, and we are here to turn the idea behind a partnership into something real and successful.

Where would you like to have Lygature’s standing in five years’ time?

‘Pioneering medicine. Together.’ is our motto, and this is our main goal to create a system where we can share ideas for the organizations to increase innovation within the system and emphasize the fact that we are pioneering medicine through PPP’s. This is always done as a team, Together. I hope that in five years’ time, we will be able to show at least 10 results that clearly surpass the capabilities of individual organizations..

What are three words you would like international readers to think of when they think of Lygature?

I would say a frontrunner, facilitator of partnerships. Partnerships play an essential role in accelerating medical innovations. Multi-party partnerships are often complex and in order to be successful they should be managed by an independent party. That is where Lygature comes in: managing multi-dimensional public-private partnerships in a successful way.

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