

New Board Appointee, Paul Clark, Describes Agenus



Last week, Agenus [announced](#) the election of Paul Clark to its board of directors. Mr. Clark has over 30 years of experience in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. He was the President and CEO of ICOS as well as an Executive Vice President and board member of Abbott Laboratories. In this week's newsletter, we interview Paul, who shares his perspectives about Agenus and the field of immuno-oncology (I-O).

What interested you to join the Agenus board?

A board member is responsible for guiding the company to effectively execute the goals required to realize its full potential. I have held board appointments at several technology and life science companies, including Abbott Laboratories, Keysight Technologies and Agilent Technologies. To be an effective board member, you need to have a strong interest in what the company does, experience in what they do, and a feeling that you can have a positive relationship with the CEO. Agenus fits all three of these aspects.

I have been fascinated by the advances in I-O. With all the money put into cancer research for decades with limited success, it is encouraging that we now have this powerful means to fight cancer. Before I made my decision to join Agenus, I had several conversations with Agenus' leadership. I was impressed by their commitment to build the company and their willingness to listen. They hope to have BLA filings for zalifrelimab (anti CTLA-4) and balstilimab (anti PD-1) in cervical cancer and plan to launch these products, which could transform the organization. I understand that new data from these trials will be [presented](#) at the ESMO Congress next week, on September 18th, by Dr. David O'Malley. I am hopeful that my experience in the development and launch of multiple commercial products will be helpful to Agenus.

What are some considerations for a successful launch?

This is the fun part. As excited as any company is about their baby that they have spent years working on, the launch becomes the moment of truth. There are many phases in a product's life cycle, but the most important is the launch. To plan for a successful launch, the company needs to understand the competition as well as they know themselves.

Cyclosporine is the only product I immediately recall that went for a long period with zero competition. Usually competition is fierce. You need to be brutally objective about your product attributes and benefits vs. competition. You must anticipate what the competitive response to your product will be. For example: this could be improved efficacy, safety, benefit to more patients, cost of therapy, etc. Science and facts need to support why a physician who has been using a competitor product for years may prefer your product once launched. Understanding this will help you position your product with greater strength. However, brand positioning and competitive advantages are only a few of the factors that contribute to a successful launch. One needs to understand the level and timing of funding required to be successful. This is essential to adequately fund promotional efforts,

establish inventory and supply chain infrastructure, and to hire a top quality sales and marketing team. Sophisticated tools need to be in place to gauge launch progress, since there are almost never second chances to launch successfully. You will want weekly updates on a multitude of dashboard metrics to see how your launch assumptions are working. This will allow you to correct course where required.

What are your thoughts about Agenus' science and pipeline?

It all starts and depends on the success of the science. It is what gets us up in the morning. It can deliver therapies that can improve the lives of patients and reward investors, which is also important.

Beyond its late stage assets, zalifrelimab and balstilimab, Agenus believes it has a very promising and innovative pipeline. What does promising mean? The candidates must target a patient need, be studied in a way that yields meaningful results, and have the potential to generate significant data and receive FDA approval. This isn't an easy feat. Then comes the challenge of capturing a significant position in the competitive marketplace. So the "promise" needs to be real and have competitive advantages. While there is never a guarantee, in my opinion, Agenus has several clinical candidates that have the potential to be launched with competitive advantages, help patients, and to become important products in the market. Agenus' focus areas were chosen wisely. They are in great demand, as evidenced by the need for more effective therapies in these areas and the size of those commercial markets.

Beyond the science, I have been impressed with Agenus' capabilities, ranging from antibody discovery and development, cell line development, and manufacturing to clinical development and operations. This kind of prowess is unusual for a biotech of this size. I am excited to join the high caliber Agenus family and am eager to be part of new advances in I-O.