



## ATAI Life Sciences takes on opioid crisis by acquiring Kures to develop novel therapeutics for opioid abuse

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BERLIN and NEW YORK, July 9, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- [ATAI Life Sciences AG](#), a global biotechnology company builder that envisions an end to mental illnesses, has acquired a majority stake in New York-based pharmaceutical company Kures, which targets the important intersection between pain and opioid use disorder. Additionally, Srinivas Rao, MD, PhD, Chief Scientific Officer of ATAI Life Sciences, has been appointed CEO of Kures.

"Joining ATAI's platform comes with much more than a capital infusion," said Dr. Rao. "Our model involves pooling resources, expertise and best practices from across the platform, helping our companies steer clear of the many pitfalls that come with breaking new ground in drug development."

Kures' flagship product, KUR-101, is a derivative of mitragynine, the major active alkaloid of the kratom plant. Used for centuries in Southeast Asia as a remedy for fatigue, pain, and myriad other conditions, kratom leaf has recently grown in popularity as an herbal medicine in the United States. Importantly, in addition to its traditional medicinal applications, consumers in the United States report that it may also be effective in ameliorating the symptoms of opioid withdrawal. Both mitragynine and KUR-101 are atypical opioid receptor modulators, boasting unique pharmacology that may make them safer than currently available opioids in treating pain. Additionally, Kures' second asset, KUR-002, is under evaluation for the treatment of subsets of depression through a unique mechanism of action.

Kures has an exclusive license from Columbia University to develop small molecules discovered in the lab of Dr. Dalibor Sames in collaboration with the labs of Dr. Jonathan Javitch and Dr. René Hen to treat pain, opioid use disorder, and depression. Sames, a professor of chemistry, uses organic synthesis and molecular design to address challenges in neuroscience and brain medicine.

Given that the majority of opioid abuse starts with a prescription to manage pain, addiction and pain are fundamentally linked. While opioids are indeed effective for most forms of *acute* pain, they are associated with a variety of adverse effects, including risk of addiction, constipation, and respiratory depression, the latter being the main cause of death among opioid users. Of individuals prescribed at least 1 day of opioids, 6% are still taking them 1 year later. Moreover, it is estimated that 8-12% of individuals prescribed opioids for chronic pain ultimately develop opioid use disorder.

There are notable drawbacks to existing opioid maintenance therapies as well. In addition to respiratory depression and high abuse potential, methadone, a full mu-opioid receptor agonist, significantly impacts cardiovascular function and can induce life threatening arrhythmias. Furthermore, it is only dispensed in highly structured clinical settings, severely limiting patient access. Buprenorphine, a partial agonist at mu-opioid receptors, is more widely available and has an improved pharmacological profile in terms of cardiac and respiratory safety, but retains significant abuse liability and promotes long-lasting dependence.

Therefore, by developing a potentially safer and more widely available alternative for both pain management and opioid maintenance therapy, ATAI and Kures are poised to address two key factors underlying the opioid epidemic. "We are very concerned about the opioid epidemic in the United States and are committed to developing approaches to both treat and prevent this condition," said Florian Brand, CEO of ATAI.

"Kures is excited to have the resources and commitment of ATAI in advancing our promising therapeutic compounds," added Andrew Kruegel, CSO and co-founder of Kures. "We look forward to working with the ATAI team to bring new treatment options to patients suffering from pain and mental illness."

ATAI is recognized as the world's leading – and largest – company in the field of psychedelic therapy. KUR-101 will join ATAI's pipeline of ground-breaking mental health interventions such as arketamine and psilocybin, with additional high-impact compounds to be announced soon.

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### About ATAI Life Sciences

Founded by visionary entrepreneur Christian Angermayer, ATAI Life Sciences AG is a global biotech platform and company builder working to address significant unmet medical needs rooted in a lack of innovation in neuropsychiatry. Based in Berlin, London and New York, its vision is to cure mental health disorders, enabling people to live healthier and happier lives.

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