

## Miguel Forte, the new face of Bone Therapeutics



*Miguel Forte has already held numerous positions in the medical and biopharmaceutical sectors.*

Olivier Gosset 25 February 2020 19:31  
(Translation Bone Therapeutics)

Miguel Forte succeeded Thomas Liénard two months ago. He begins his mandate with the launch of two clinical trials, a fundraising campaign and the search for partners.

Change in continuity. Appointed two months ago at the helm of Bone Therapeutics, Miguel Forte describes himself as a CEO with a different profile from that of his predecessor, Thomas Liénard, at a time when carolo biotech specialized in bone cell therapy has reached a turning point in its evolution.

"The previous management changed Bone's organisation and prepared the company to focus on clinical trials, commercial product launches and even more innovation," explains the new Portuguese manager. "These are things I have already done. There are clinical skills, in development or in the regulatory field, that I can bring. It made sense to have a CEO with experience of bringing a product to market."

### **Many hats**

Throughout his career, Miguel Forte has worn many hats in the medical and biopharmaceutical sectors, while keeping a foot in the academic world. Originally a doctor specialising in infectious diseases, he has worked for the European Medicines Agency, alternating periods in big pharma (UCB, where he participated in the launch of Cimzia) with positions of responsibility in biotechs (TxCell and Bone already, where he was Chief Medical Officer).

His last position as Managing Director of Zelluna, a Norwegian biotech company specialising in cancer treatment by immunotherapy, allowed him to become even more familiar with cell therapy. "It's an exciting field," he says. "With cells, we're at a new frontier of medicine," he says.

The main challenges facing the new CEO are well known. "What Bone has to do is deliver what we promised, carry out the tests on time and deliver the results," he sums up. Walloon biotech is at a turning point, with the imminent launch of two new clinical studies, one of which is in phase III.

The latter concerns JTA-004, a product aimed at treating people with osteoarthritis of the knee. The first patients in the trial, which will be conducted in Europe (including Belgium) and Hong Kong, will begin enrolment shortly. Results are expected in the second half of 2021.

### **Relevant data**

JTA-004 is a not cell therapy product. It is a viscosupplement, a gel that lubricates diseased joints. The drug candidate is based on hyaluronic acid (a proven product), but is supplemented with a pain relieving agent and a protein solution. "This clinical trial, which will be conducted with 676 patients in comparison with a placebo and the current leading product, will provide us with relevant clinical data," says Miguel Forte.

If all goes well, this osteoarthritis product will be the first to come out of the Gosselies company's labs for the market, through one or more partnerships. "What we're doing is the clinical and regulatory preparation. We don't intend to set up a commercial structure to bring it to market. We already have contacts with some who would like to broaden their portfolio".

The second clinical study that is on the horizon is a Phase IIb trial to evaluate the allogeneic cell therapy product, Allob, in patients with difficult fractures of the tibia. The timetable for this product, described as "most innovative", is different: while the new study, which will be conducted with just under 200 patients, will start in Europe (and also in Belgium) in the second quarter of 2020, the first results will not be known until mid-2022.

"This is an allogeneic cell therapy platform," the CEO emphasizes. These cells, which come from a healthy donor, can be stored at the point of use and are manufactured using a suitable process on an industrial scale and at controlled costs". Moreover, the product has also achieved good results in patients who have undergone a spinal fusion procedure, while other indications are being examined, particularly in facial surgery.

Miguel Forte confirms that the company, which has cash until the end of the third quarter of 2020, will "very soon" replenish its coffers. "The raising of cash should allow us to go almost to the end of 2021, when we will have the results of JTA. At that time, we will have partnership opportunities that will allow us to continue and deliver results for the fractures".