CLOSER LOOK

MEMORANDUM

Novo Nordisk enters exclusive licensing agreement with China's United Biotechnology to develop triple GLP-1/GIP/glucagon RA, UBT251, now in phase 2 – March 24, 2025

United Biotechnology to receive $200 million upfront and up to $1.8 billion in milestone payments; UBT251 conferred 15% weight loss at Week 12 in a phase 1b trial

Novo Nordisk announced today an exclusive license agreement with China's United Biotechnology to develop once-weekly injectable triple GLP-1/GIP/glucagon RA, UBT251, for obesity, T2D, and other cardiometabolic diseases.

Under the terms of agreement, Novo Nordisk will develop, manufacture, and commercialize UBT251 in global markets outside mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan – where United Biotechnology will hold rights for development and commercialization. United Biotechnology is eligible to receive $200 million in upfront payment and up to $1.8 billion in milestone payments, as well as tiered royalties on net sales from Novo Nordisk.

In a phase 1b trial (n=36), UBT251 (1 mg, 3 mg, and 6 mg) conferred up to 15% weight loss from baseline. The safety profile was consistent with other incretin-based therapies, with mild-to-moderate GI events being the most frequent.

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Lilly's retatrutide conferred up to 12% weight loss at 12 weeks in phase 2 trial

UBT251 compares to Lilly's once-weekly, injectable, triple GLP-1/GIP/glucagon RA, retatrutide, which conferred up to 24% weight loss from a baseline of 237 lbs (108 kg) vs. 2% in placebo in a 48-week phase 2 trial (n=338). At Week 12, retatrutide achieved weight loss of up to 12%, and 18% at Week 24 – with a longer treatment period, we're curious if UBT251 will confer weight reduction similar to retatrutide.

Additionally, all participants in the phase 2 trial on retatrutide achieved ≥5% weight loss, 93% achieved ≥10% weight loss, 83% achieved ≥15% weight loss, 63% achieved ≥20% weight loss, 48% achieved ≥25% weight loss, and 26% achieved ≥30% weight loss.

Retatrutide is currently being evaluated in multiple phase 3 trials for T2D (TRANSCEND-T2D 1, 2, and 3), obesity (TRIUMPH-3), obstructive sleep apnea (TRIUMPH-1), T2D (TRIUMPH-2), osteoarthritis (TRIUMPH-4), and cardiovascular and renal outcomes (TRIUMPH-Outcomes). Most trials will be completed in 2026, while the outcomes trial will be completed in 2029.

Novo Nordisk entered multiple partnerships in 2025 for cardiometabolic portfolio

In 2025 alone, Novo Nordisk entered multiple partnerships to expand its cardiometabolic portfolio.

- In March 2025, the company partnered with Gensaic, which uses FORGE (Functional Optimization by Recursive Genetic Evolution) technology to develop tissue-selective therapies for cardiometabolic disease. Under the terms of agreement, Novo Nordisk will reimburse R&D costs and pay Gensaic up to $354 million in upfront payments, development, and commercial milestones *per target* plus tiered royalties.
- In January 2025, the company expanded its partnership with Valo Health, which leverages an AI-powered computational platform to identify novel therapeutic targets. Under the agreement, Valo Health received near-term payments of $190 million, plus milestone payments of up to $4.6 billion for 20 drug programs – up from $2.7 billion for 11 programs in 2023.

- Also in January 2025, Novo Nordisk partnered with Variant Bio, which uses VB-Inference program, as well as its global community partners, to identify and validate genetic variations associated with metabolic diseases. Novo Nordisk paid up to $50 million in upfront payments and R&D funding, in addition to potential milestone payments.

In the last couple of decades, particularly after Mr. Lars Jorgensen took over as CEO nearly a decade ago (2017), Novo Nordisk has established or joined in multiple partnerships to accelerate treatments for type 2 diabetes, type 1 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, and a burgeoning field including combined cardiac, kidney, and metabolic disease approaches. These collaborations include partnerships with companies that are leveraging what are said to be AI-powered platforms to develop novel therapies. We highlight additional collaborations announced in 2024 in the table below.

Table 1: Novo Nordisk Partnerships 2024 and 2025

Date	Details
Photys Therapeutics, December 2024	Massachusetts-based Photys Therapeutics announced its collaboration with Novo Nordisk to develop new proximity-based therapies for an undisclosed cardiometabolic disease. Under the agreement, Photys will be responsible for preclinical development, and Novo Nordisk will advance therapeutic candidates through clinical, regulatory, and commercial stages. Photys will receive up to $186 million across upfront and milestone payments, in addition to royalties and R&D funding.
Ascendis, November 2024	Denmark-based Ascendis announced that Novo Nordisk has acquired an exclusive global license to its TransCon technologies, which leverages sustained release technologies, to develop therapeutics for cardiometabolic diseases, including once-monthly GLP-1 RA for obesity and T2D. Novo Nordisk will pay Ascendis $285 million upfront, plus milestones and tiered royalty payments.
Kallyope, September 2024	Novo Nordisk signed a license agreement with Kallyope to advance a novel peptide therapy for obesity. Kallyope has identified this ligand, which Novo Nordisk has licensed to further develop as a candidate for obesity. Novo Nordisk is responsible for further preclinical and clinical development, manufacturing, and commercialization of the selected ligand. Kallyope has received an undisclosed upfront payment and may receive additional payments for development, sales milestones, and license product royalties.
Korro Bio, September 2024	Novo Nordisk partnered with Massachusetts-based Korro Bio to develop two RNA-based therapeutics targeting cardiometabolic diseases. Korro's RNA-editing OPERA platform will help develop two undisclosed targets. Korro can receive up to $530 million, including upfront, development, and commercial milestone payments, in addition to royalties and R&D funding.
Evotec, September 2024	Novo Nordisk partnered with Evotec to develop stem cell-based therapies in an undisclosed therapeutic area. Novo Nordisk will fund development and manufacturing, although financial terms remain undisclosed, and will have an option to use developed technologies exclusively for pre-defined therapeutic area
Omege and Cellarity, January 2024	Novo Nordisk formed alliances with Omega Therapeutics and Cellarity, both based in Massachusetts, to explore treatments for obesity and MASH, through a collaboration with venture capital fund Flagship Pioneering that began in May 2022.

Close Concerns' Questions

1. Beyond obesity and T2D, what other diseases might Novo Nordisk and United Biotechnology study as use cases for UBT251?
2. How might UBT251 be differentiated from Lilly's retatrutide?
3. To what extent could a longer treatment period help UBT251 confer a greater degree of weight loss?
4. How might this partnership be distinguished versus other partnerships Novo Nordisk has established with other entities over time?

5. What will make it more likely that United Biotechnology will reach the nearly $2.0 billion in milestone payments?
6. Might there be any detail on the strategy and agreements behind the tiered royalties?

--by Kat Moon, Esther Min, Monica Oxenreiter, and Kelly Close