A swift changing of the guard at Gilead oncology

Jacob Plieth

During his time as head of Roche pharma Daniel O’Day was a CAR-T naysayer: he favoured the science but viewed industry assets as overpriced, and on his watch Roche – the world’s biggest oncology player - had no adoptive cell therapy presence. So when five days after Mr O’Day formally became chief executive of Gilead the departure was announced of that company’s head of oncology, Alessandro Riva, there seemed an obvious reason: Mr Riva had orchestrated the $11.9bn takeover of the CAR-T company Kite Pharma, and was carrying the can for this much criticised move. But Mizuho’s Salim Sayed yesterday sprung into action with a note insisting that the departure had “absolutely nothing to do with Gilead’s future commitment to cell therapy, the Kite acquisition, Yescarta launch, or Dan O’Day’s recent joining”. Mr O’Day might have wanted to avoid starting his tenure with this kind of negative news. A similar consideration might separately be making Galapagos investors uncomfortable as they await readout of the Finch-1 and 3 trials of the Gilead-partnered Jak inhibitor filgotinib, by the end of this quarter. As filgotinib is Gilead’s most valuable pipeline hope, a delay would be read as a portent of poor data.

Gilead share price (NASDAQ: GILD)