

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Julie Block
Vice President
415-499-3474
cell 415-609-1836
julie@nationaleczema.org

***NATIONAL ECZEMA ASSOCIATION APPLAUDS THE START OF THE FIRST U.S. STUDY
INVESTIGATING A POTENTIAL NEW TREATMENT FOR PATIENTS WITH
SEVERE CHRONIC HAND ECZEMA***

SAN RAFAEL, Calif. (January 14, 2009) - Today, the National Eczema Association (NEA) applauds the news from Basilea Pharmaceutica that the HANDEL clinical study (HAND Eczema research of alitretinoin study) has opened for enrollment.

“This is very exciting news,” said Vicki Kalabokes, Chief Executive Officer of National Eczema Association. “The psychological, economic and social impact of severe, chronic hand eczema can be enormous and thus patients are hopeful that this potential treatment would provide another option to consider when managing this debilitating condition.”

Approximately, 31.6 million Americans are affected by eczema and in more than one-quarter cases, the skin symptoms are constant and unrelenting. Estimates indicate that between two percent and 10 percent of Americans have some form of hand dermatitis and hand dermatitis may account for 80 percent of all job-related skin conditions.

Chronic Hand Eczema (CHE), also known as chronic hand dermatitis, is characterized by thick, scaly skin that commonly gives rise to blisters, redness, swelling and painful cracks in the skin. Studies suggest these patients have a significantly reduced quality of life and substantial occupational disability, including prolonged sick leave and unemployment, and low self-esteem and social phobia.

There are currently no approved agents in the United States for the treatment of patients with severe CHE that have failed to respond to potent topical steroids.

The HANDEL study is a double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized clinical trial that will investigate the efficacy and safety of alitretinoin in the treatment of patients with severe CHE who have not responded to potent topical steroids. In the HANDEL study participants will be randomized to receive oral alitretinoin or placebo for up to 24 weeks. The primary endpoint of the clinical trial is the response rate as measured by the achievement of clear or almost clear hands according to the physician’s global assessment. Assessments of safety will be similar to that employed in previous large studies and will include a pregnancy risk management plan for female patients of childbearing age. The study will take place in approximately 90 sites across the United States and is planned to enroll 600 patients.

Alitretinoin, an investigative treatment in the United States for CHE, is a naturally occurring compound – a derivative of vitamin A - and belongs to the well studied family of retinoids. All retinoids are teratogens (substances that can cause birth defects). Therefore, pregnant women should avoid alitretinoin therapy and strict pregnancy prevention measures must be in place for all women of child-bearing potential who receive alitretinoin.

“There is a real sense of excitement within the dermatology community with the start of this important trial,” said Dr. Donald Belsito, HANDEL Lead Investigator and Clinical Professor of Medicine (Dermatology) at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. “Chronic hand eczema is a debilitating condition, and there are currently no FDA-approved treatment options for those unresponsive to potent topical steroids.”

For more information on this study, please visit www.clinicaltrials.gov.

For useful resources on eczema, please visit www.nationaleczema.org.

National Eczema Association is committed to its mission of improving the health and quality of life of people with eczema through research, support, and awareness.

###

For media inquiries, contact Julie Block, +1-415-499-3474, of National Eczema Association or Jonathan Potter, +1-212-453-2406, of Fleishman-Hillard