

U-M doctor's discovery is important for medicine and business

Dr. Arul Chinnaiyan's prostate cancer discovery with roots in his rapidly growing year-old spinoff has an enormous potential to save lives while benefiting both business and academia.

That potential is what made his story land on page one of this paper (*Ann Arbor Business Review*, May 10-16).

When Chinnaiyan and his research team discovered late in summer 2005 that prostate cancer is most likely caused by gene fusion, he started a ball rolling that shows no sign of slowing down.

"This discovery could prove to be one of the most exciting breakthroughs in prostate cancer diagnostics to date," said Larry Mimms, from Gen-Probe. Gen-Probe fought to purchase the license for a diagnostic product based on the discovery in a summer 2006 bidding war overseen by the University of Michigan's Office of Tech Transfer.

Already Gen-Probe has developed a prototype of a urine sample diagnostic that proves to be more comfortable and accurate than the current method of diagnosing prostate cancer by PSA blood test and needle biopsy.

An improved diagnostic can save lives in prostate cancer, the second leading cause of death for men in this country.

Scientists had previously believed that gene fusion was mostly found in blood

cancers such as leukemias and lymphomas, some of which are treatable. Now there is the potential that gene fusion might be the cause of other solid cancers. This can lead the way to new diagnosing methods and treatments for breast, lung and colon cancer.

Underlying the potential is Chinnaiyan, a 37-year-old professor at U-M who is named the uniquely prestigious S. P. Hicks Endowed Professor of Pathology. "He is a superb young investigator who truly is making progress that you would not expect out of someone so young," said Dr. Jim Woolliscroft, Interim Dean of the Medical School.

Chinnaiyan also has shown a skill for innovation by combining valuable resources of both individuals and data

He and his colleagues aggregated hundreds of databases containing cancer molecular signatures into the one tool that they needed to assist their research. Without it, Chinnaiyan said that making the prostate discovery would be like finding a needle in a haystack. Now the tool exists for facilitating future discoveries.

The huge database was commercialized as Oncomine one year ago. It's a product of Compendia Bioscience, which Chinnaiyan co-founded.

His 40-person lab is also poised for growth, having just been named the Michigan Center for Translational Pathology.

HEALTH WATCH Deb Merion



The business world and academia are sharing use of the Compendia Bioscience database, forging a beneficial symbiotic relationship. "When it works like this, everyone benefits," said Robin Rasor of U-M's Tech Transfer.

Eight of the top 20 pharmaceuticals pay fees to Compendia. They use the database to search for cancer diagnostics and treatments to market and to track their own data. Commercialization has made the database industrial-strength, said Chinnaiyan, but academics can still use the database for free.

That may make Compendia a star among venture capital companies, too.

"At EDF, we have been partnering with universities for many years, and that strategy has given birth to some of our most successful portfolio companies," said Mary Lincoln Campbell, managing director of EDF Ventures, an Ann Arbor-based venture capital firm. "We invested \$1 million in Intralace, an eye surgery technology firm, and the company was ac-

quired seven years later for \$850,000,000."

The Ann Arbor business community can benefit down the road from banking on the potential of small businesses like Compendia, said Campbell. Because young companies have more needs than funds, Campbell recommends that local businesses nurture new firms starting out and gain new clients by offering special discount packages for services such as law, accounting or banking.

One cheek swab may save a life

One cheek swab can determine if you can contribute to the National Marrow Donor Program, which has given 25,000 patients a second chance at life since it began operations in 1986.

Thanks to a 10th grader at Greenhills School, Ann Arbor area residents can take a swipe at getting onto the list.

Olivia VanderTuig organized a bone marrow drive from 1:30-6 p.m. May 18 at the school, 850 Greenhills Dr.

The drive was prompted by two family members who were both diagnosed with the exact same kind of leukemia.

For information, call (734) 769-4010 or go to www.marrow.org.

■ Debbie Merion is a freelance writer and writing coach. She can be reached at demerion@aol.com.



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