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UCT spin-out TB diagnostics firm wins prestigious NSTF award New test gives result in under two hours, allowing treatment to start on same day

Antrum Biotech (Pty) Ltd, a spin-out company from the University of Cape Town, has won a South African National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) award in partnership with South 32, for their innovative work in developing a test for tuberculosis (TB), which has significant implications for treatment.

The company has developed a test based on research done at UCT to detect non-pulmonary forms of the disease that were previously notoriously difficult to detect. The test exploits the discovery that a protein associated with Th1 immunity, which is produced in response to the infection, can be found at high levels in certain body fluids.

The new test exploits this scientific discovery by adapting low-cost detection technology that is already used in many laboratories. The test has been described as a major breakthrough. The current tests are either insensitive or very slow and a better test was urgently needed. The new test gives a result in under two hours, allowing same-day initiation of treatment.

TB is one of the world's most deadly diseases. The World Health Organization estimates that 9 million people are affected each year and that it kills nearly 1.5 million every year. In South Africa and some other countries TB is the number one cause of adult death. TB is best known as a disease of the lungs, but up to half of TB cases in some countries are extra-pulmonary, affecting other parts of the body. It is especially a problem in the elderly and in people with weakened immune systems.

"We are delighted to receive this recognition," says Khilona Radia, Antrum's Chief Executive Officer. "At Antrum our aim is to develop products that will have a social impact and provide an African solution to an African problem. We hope this new test will help patients obtain the treatment they need for this terrible disease."

"The story of Antrum illustrates our commitment to the full innovation cycle of discovery, development, and dissemination of research findings for public good. We need to overcome the innovation chasm in which a lot of research papers are published, but very few translate to social benefits. We look forward to many more Antrums developing from the host of other research endeavors in the Department of Medicine at UCT," said Professor Bongani Mayosi,

Head of the Department of Medicine where Antrum is based.

Professor Danie Visser, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Internationalisation at UCT, congratulated the Antrum team: "They have, in a very short space of time, translated the excellent research done by Professor Keertan Dheda and his team at UCT into a tangible product that will have a huge impact on patient care. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Industrial Development Corporation for the financial Investment in this venture."

About Antrum Biotech Ltd

Antrum Biotech Ltd was established in 2008 to be a global contributor to innovation in healthcare. It aims to provide quality diagnostics for important diseases at affordable prices. The company is co-owned by the University of Cape Town and the Industrial Development Corporation. Based in South Africa, they are specialists in diagnostic test research and development, working from target discovery to delivery of quality products for improved patient care. www.antrumbiotech.com

About the NSTF Awards

The NSTF Awards, in partnership with South32, honour and celebrate outstanding contributions to science, engineering, technology and innovation (SETI) in South Africa. The Awards, which were established in 1998 and whose patron is the Minister of Science and Technology, have grown to be prestigious public awards. The NSTF Awards celebrate scientific research that is professional, innovative, forward looking and relevant to both South Africa and the rest of the world.

Antrum Biotech were announced as winners of an award for research leading to an innovation and presented with the prestigious, custom-designed trophy on 10 July 2015.

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