

Treatment unveiled: Cancer research at ULM nears fruition

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A breakthrough breast cancer drug being developed at the University of Louisiana at Monroe's School of Pharmacy could be on the market in less than two years.

Paul Sylvester, ULM pharmacologist, said Monday research is progressing as expected on tocotrienols, a substance naturally found in vitamin E, that could result in a drug that would prevent breast cancer as well as kill cancer cells in people diagnosed with breast cancer. The drug could make it to the commercial market in less than 24 months, he said.

Sylvester's comments came during a news conference with representatives of Beta Pharmaceutical, a research-based biopharmaceutical company that has funded ULM's breast cancer research.

"It looks like we're in a position of getting a product on the market in about a year-and-a-half," said Sylvester, who has been working on breast cancer research for nearly 20 years. "We'd like to start clinical trials about the same time, too."

Scientists at the university have been developing novel cancer chemo-preventive agents using tocotrienols as treatments for breast cancers. The tocotrienols are found in palm oil and have been shown by scientific research to be potent anticancer agents that are able to attack specific pathways associated with certain cancer and kill the cancer cells.

The new drug would not only help prevent breast cancer, but could also be used to treat it through injections to the patient, Sylvester said.

"It would be a prevention pill a woman would take every day," Sylvester said.

The initial product would not have to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration because it is a natural product.

Funding for the research has come from Beta Pharmaceuticals of Perth, Australia and partner First Tech International. Beta recently extended the project's funding period through December 2010. The company's total funding for the project is more than \$1 million.

Beta's board Chairman Alan Reid was at the new conference. Reid had been meeting with ULM representatives and the company's Baton Rouge-based patent attorneys about patents on the new drug.

"To date, the results of the work have been outstanding," said Reid. "We're very hopeful and optimistic about the future of the project. It's proceeding in line with our expectations."

The company has already filed provisional patent applications on the drug and is preparing to file several more in anticipation of marketing it.

Greg Leader, ULM School of Pharmacy interim dean, said he's hopeful the collaboration between Beta Pharmaceuticals and the school is a sign of things to come.

"This is typical of the cutting-edge research going on at the university," Leader said. "These are the types of collaboration we would like to bring into the Monroe area to stimulate the economy."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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