

Major boost to drug discovery

Epichem Pty Ltd is an example of how successful cooperation between the industry sector and a leading university has the potential to become a major export earner for both parties involved.



The company, wholly owned by PharmAust Ltd recently received a major boost to its collaborative antiparasitic drug discovery project with Murdoch University with its lead compound passing the bacterial reverse mutation test. The test, referred to as the Ames Test, is a key indicator of the compound's genotoxicity and is a critical step in the development of any new drug candidate.

A patent will protect these novel compounds and Epichem and Murdoch will share the commercialisation return from this intellectual property.

Epichem managing director Dr Wayne Best said the project had produced a range of compounds that had shown "excellent activity" against a number of important animal and human parasitic diseases, including trypanosomiasis and leishmaniasis. "These diseases, for which there are currently no

effective treatments, have enormous social and economic impact in Africa, South and Central America and Asia," he said.

"The project...has potential to deliver affordable and effective drugs for diseases in developing nations."

Epichem, which had moved what must the largest assembly of specialised chemists in the country to premises leased from Murdoch University earlier this year, in order to be closer to the university's researchers, is collaborating with Professor Andrew Thompson, a renowned world leader in the field of parasitology who heads both

Murdoch's Department of Parasitology and the Centre for Biomolecular Control of Disease.

The project, funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) and pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline has attracted interest from the World Health Organisation (WHO) because of its potential to deliver affordable and effective drugs for diseases in developing nations.

The partnership combines the synthetic and medicinal chemistry skills of Epichem with the parasitology expertise and bioassays of Murdoch University.

While a commercial pharmaceutical from the project is still some several years away, the result to date has generated considerable excitement and confidence that will drive the project forward. The positive result came as welcome news to PharmAust Ltd on the successful completion of its \$5.5 million capital

raising to acquire more assets in the pharmaceutical production chain.

A month earlier PharmAust had finalised an exclusive Channel and Distribution Agreement with Xepa-Soul Pattinson, a wholly owned subsidiary of Apex Healthcare Berhad Malaysia, to register, market and distribute pharmaceutical products in Australia.

PharmAust chairman Dr Paul D'Sylva said Malaysia's lower

cost base and early patent expiry would allow achieve significant cost savings over domestic competitors.

"This agreement forms a vital link in the pharmaceutical discovery, development, production and supply chain, thus complementing PharmAust's two existing subsidiary businesses, Epichem Pty Ltd and PharmAust Manufacturing Pty Ltd," he said.

