

Epichem drug deal good value

□ Julie-ann Sprague

ORGANIC chemists at newly formed start-up Epichem will commence drug discovery research from next week.

Established by former Chemistry Centre WA principal research chemist Wayne Best, Epichem aims, in collaboration with Murdoch University scientists, to develop drug cures as well as fulfilling contracts with drug discovery companies, which will use the company's research to on-sell drugs for commercialisation by pharmaceutical companies.

"We were incorporated in September last year but as of this week we will run the company as it should [be run]," Dr Best said. "It was just me and a table and chair running the place, but we've got a state-of-the-art facility ready to use now."

The \$500,000 facility was purpose built for drug discovery

and is based at Murdoch University.

ASX-listed Echo Technologies owns 80 per cent of the company and the chemists own 20 per cent.

"Echo Technologies used to invest in travel software but they were looking for something else, something that was high-tech but wasn't a black hole," Dr Best said.

"We have a good blend of R&D and contract work."

He said contracts with international drug discovery companies would ensure a constant cash flow while the company invested time in its R&D.

"The clients we work with have a particular field that we provide the synthetic and medicinal chemistry for," Dr Best told *WA Business News*.

"For example, they might say to us that this protein has a relationship with this disease and if you can inhibit that protein you

can cure the disease, so go away and work on it.

"We [the team of scientists at Chemistry Centre] have come up with a number of compounds that have ended up in patents or that have been on-sold."

"At the moment the contracts we have are all in Australia but I would expect Epichem to have a global outlook. I see our future in targeting places such as the UK and western Europe."

The five chemists who worked with Dr Best at the Chemistry Centre join him at Epichem from next week.

While Murdoch University has no financial stake in the project (other than from revenue received as Epichem's landlord), Dr Best said the opportunity for the university to feed off the intellectual capabilities of its researchers, and vice versa, was a bonus.

"They had some space and let it out to us. It helps them build a

critical mass of chemistry skills and it's a good synergy to have. They want to increase their health sciences and pharmaceutical areas," he said.

"We can train people because we will need staff, and this way we can take PhD students in."

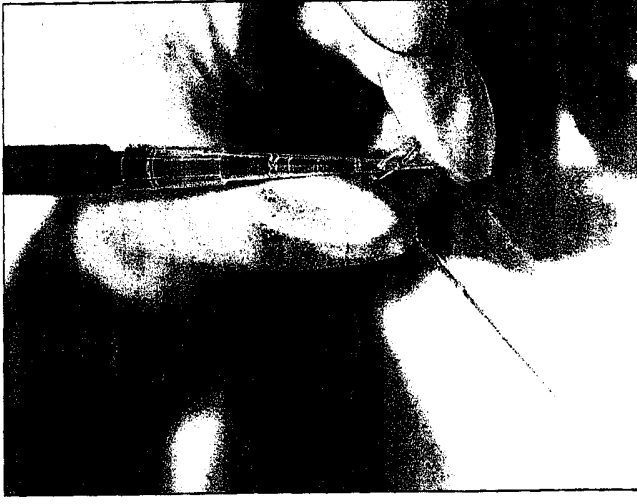
Dr Best said that, at capacity, Epichem could employ up to 10 scientists and handle up to 15 projects at any one time.

Dr Best has been researching and developing drugs for the past 20 years.

"I was working for the government (at the Chemistry Centre) for the past five years," he said.

"We got to work on anti-parasitic drugs, drugs for malaria and African sleeping sickness. There the things pharmaceutical companies are not interested in because there is no money in it."

"But African sleeping sickness affects 10 million people and there is no drug on the market."



GOOD DEAL: Epichem will start drug discovery research next week at its \$500,000 facility at Murdoch University.

WORTH A LOOK:

Owner of Busselton's iconic The Goose Café and Restaurant, Rhys Passmore, says the new \$1 million restaurant and function facility on the Busselton foreshore will be completed by October.



IN THE NEWS

Pivot's West Perth plans

PETER Laurance's Pivot Group is poised to start construction on a multi-million dollar office development in West Perth.

The development group has received planning approval for its four-storey, 4,000 square metre office building at 18-24 Parliament Place, and is now waiting for final approval from Parliament House Precinct Committee.

The development, which is understood to have a project value of between \$10 million and \$20 million, will go ahead without tenant pre-commitment.

Direct Group resident manager Ian Italianni said the firm