

## **Kiyatec scores \$200k in funding from SCRA program to further develop 3D cell-culture tools**

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By Charlotte LoBuono

Kiyatec, a Pendleton, SC-based spin-out of Clemson University, announced last week that it received \$200,000 in funding from SC Launch! to help it develop 3-dimensional cell-culture plasticware and instrumentation.

SC Launch! is a joint venture of the South Carolina Research Authority, a non-profit commercialization services company, and the research foundations of South Carolina universities, including Clemson, that supports start-ups based in South Carolina. It awarded Kiyatec a \$25,000 grant in 2007 and \$175,000 in seed funding the following year, a Kiyatec official told CBA News this week.

Kiyatec CEO and co-founder Matt Gevaert said the company's 3D cell-culture products could enable cell biologists to improve the accuracy of information they obtain from cells grown in 3D cell culture.

The company's technology, called the Virtual Human Model, does this by mimicking as closely as possible the natural physiology of the human body.

3D cell culture research is increasing, but scientists tend to perform the research "sort of in an ad-hoc way," Gevaert said. "We want to be positioned as the enabling technology platform."

The VHM platform evolved from research performed on 3D cell scaffolds in Clemson's bioengineering department. It was invented by David Orr, a co-founder of Kiyatec, when he was a graduate student in the department.

According to the company's website, the VHM technology comprises a bioreactor system designed to produce a human tissue model "capable of overcoming common deficiencies encountered with existing pre-clinical drug discovery methods."

The goal of the VHM technology is to reduce the time and cost associated with pre-clinical drug discovery and to provide drug makers with data for the regulatory approval process.

Kiyatec has licensed the core technology from Clemson University and has a patent application on file.

Drug discovery is one of the intended applications for Kiyatec's cell culture tools. "We believe that these [tools] will have applications in the research market, the drug-discovery market, and personalized medicine — basically using the 3D cell culture to obtain information about the individual cell donor," said Gevaert.

He said the VHM platform is in the development stage, and that Kiyatec "hope[s] to have our plasticware in some test labs this summer ... [and] have a full-fledged product available within 6 to 9 months."

He said the company plans to debut "some test products this summer."

Gevaert said Kiyatec also intends to begin studying other potential applications for the platform. "We foresee that this will be attractive to a lot of other people," he said, adding that the firm "will definitely try to leverage other people's experience in applications development as well."

Gevaert added that Kiyatec will pen application-development partnerships simultaneously with the release of the test products.

Kiyatec has already identified some undisclosed partners for product testing, but it is interested in partnering with any labs interested in such testing, said Gevaert.

As for applications development partners, "in the same vein as our product development partners, we will announce those separately via press releases, and the timing is dictated by a strategy so I'm unable to give you names right now," Gevaert said.

However, Kiyatec does have some applications development partners lined up. "We are still open to further applications development discussions with prospective partners though — we would gladly leverage someone else's deeper experience in some areas, and believe there is great potential for third parties to develop their own value using our 3D cell culture approach as a platform."

He said Kiyatec envisions closing a small round of funding in the next "little bit ... to parallel the seed funding that we have already received." He added the company anticipates closing a Series A round of venture-capital financing "probably in about a year."

Kiyatec is currently located in the Center for Applied Technology in Pendleton, an incubator run by the Clemson University Research Foundation. "We anticipate that this space will be adequate for our pre-A round needs," said Gevaert.