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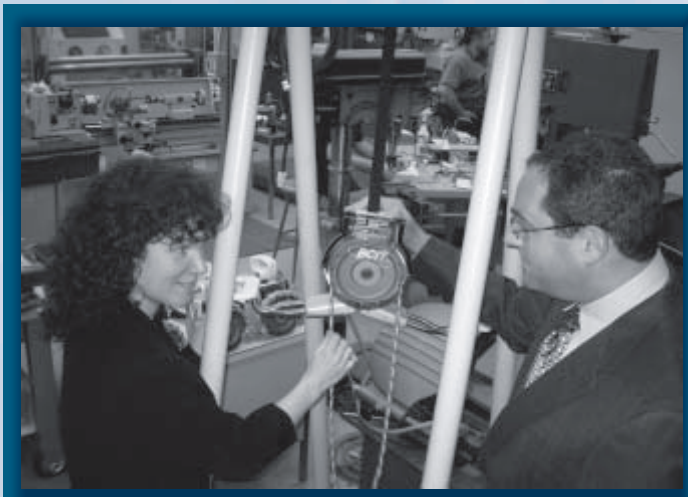
Technology Commercialization Focus Helps Develop Medical Devices for Market

by Jillian Glover

Home-support workers, unlike healthcare workers in hospitals and nursing homes, often face the risky job of manually lifting and carrying patients without the aid of lifting devices. An alarming number of lift-related workplace accidents prompted the **British Columbia Institute of Technology's (BCIT) Health Technology Research Group** to develop an innovative patient-lifting device for home use.



Nancy Paris-Seeley and Matthew Mintz show off the patient lifting device developed by BCIT's Technology Research Group.

"The home lift device will create a safer environment for home support workers community health workers and their patients clients," says Nancy Paris-Seeley, director of the Health Technology Research Group. "Like many of the health technologies our group creates, the device has huge market potential, so we want to focus on promoting it to a broader audience."

For more than 12 years, BCIT has been at the forefront of researching and developing medical technology. Now, with the support of Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), BCIT can prepare these innovative, made-in-B.C. products like the home lift device for commercial success.

The BCIT Health Technology Research Group received $340,000 from WD in 2004 to develop a commercialization office for medical and assistive devices. The new **Technology Commercialization Office** will help bridge the gap between researching and developing medical and assistive devices and turning them into commercially viable products. The office's support will result in more products reaching the marketplace not only in Canada, but internationally as well.

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"The innovative technologies coming out of BCIT and its clients have significant potential in a marketplace that has only just begun to be realized," says Matthew Mintz, director of the Technology Commercialization Office. "Real opportunities appear when quality research and development is guided by market dynamics. This office will help close the loop between innovation and commercialization, bringing back benefits to B.C. companies, patients and investors."

In the past, a lack of effective commercialization guidance has slowed the success of many businesses in the health technologies industry. Most innovators were more concerned with prototype development and not focused on creating a commercially viable product or company. To help these innovators focus on business planning and market research, the new commercialization office will provide an executive team with knowledge and experience in commercializing medical technologies.

"Capital markets today are demanding that innovators demonstrate their product's technical merits and have a plan to take those products to market," says Mintz. "Our goal is to help innovators take an objective look at their technology early in its development. This helps ensure that they are addressing a real market opportunity and that the design is consistent with market desires. This preparation gives them a better understanding of customers and increases the company's credibility with investors and partners."

The BCIT Health and Technology Research Group currently works with national and international clients from the government, private sector, academic institutions and industry associations. The group helps these clients develop state-of-the-art medical technology and strengthen B.C.'s medical device industry.

"We are excited about the new commercialization office and how it will improve the way we think about developing health technology," notes Paris-Seeley.

The research group specializes in developing technology prototypes – involving engineering, industrial design, electronics and plastics – and evaluating new technologies in areas such as gerontology, biomechanics and epidemiology. This means they are involved in everything from assessing knee braces to developing a patient-lifting device. With the help of the new commercialization office, BCIT's research group has the potential to help improve the quality of work and life for many people, while creating business opportunities for B.C.

For more information about the programs and services offered by BCIT, visit www.bcit.ca.

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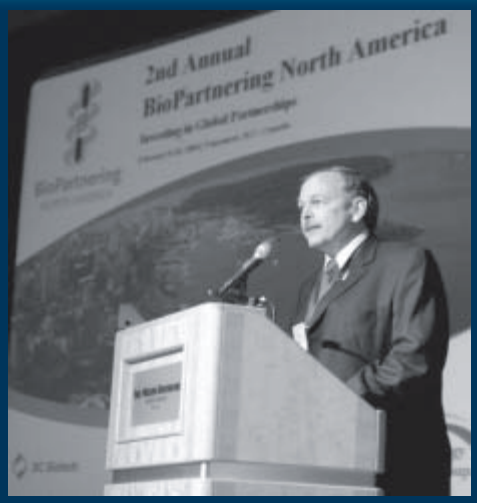
Biotechnology Conference Builds Vancouver's Reputation as Biotech Cluster

by Jillian Glover

Biotechnology, whether it is used to develop new classes of antibodies or advance AIDS/HIV and cancer therapies, is breaking scientific ground around the globe. This is especially true for Vancouver, which has the third fastest growing biotechnology industry in North America.

For the third year in a row, Vancouver will host the annual **BioPartnering North America** conference. This world-class event is an important meeting place for biotechnology's global leaders. Western Economic Diversification Canada is a proud sponsor of the event, which strengthens international investment in western Canadian companies and increases the profile of Western Canada's growing technology clusters.



Paul Stinson, executive director of B.C. Biotech, welcomed delegates to BioPartnering North America 2004. More than 800 delegates representing 350 companies from 27 countries attended the 2004 event.

The third annual BioPartnering conference is being held February 6-8, 2005, at the Westin Bayshore Resort and Marina. Vancouver is the only North American city to host the BioPartnering conference, but they have been running in Europe for the past 10 years.

Biotechnology usually refers to any technique that uses living organisms to make or modify products, to improve plants and animals, or to develop micro-organisms for specific use. Historically, it has impacted health, agriculture and environmental protection. In B.C., firms in the healthcare sector dominate the biotechnology industry, but the province is also showing strengths in other life sciences. For example, the wine industry is using biotechnology to increase research capabilities, improve grape production and enhance the quality of wines produced.

"British Columbia's biotech industry is built on world-class science and a strong track record of commercialization," says Paul Stinson, executive director of B.C. Biotech, the co-host of BioPartnering North America. "Because of this, we are becoming internationally recognized as a leading biopharmaceutical cluster."

Last year's conference brought together emerging and established technology companies for networking, an open house, presentations on emerging companies, as well as workshops on best practices given by leaders from the financial, pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries.

"This annual event has already become one of the most important partnering conferences in the world, attracting international companies to Vancouver to see first-hand the strength of our cluster," adds Stinson.

For more information on BioPartnering North America, visit www.techvision.com/bpn.

Columbia

Biotechnology Commercialization Firm a Success Story

by Carla S. Shore

The new home of **StemCell Technologies Inc.** is big – 40,000 sq. ft. of offices, laboratories, production and distribution facilities. But with more than 170 employees worldwide, 89 patent applications covering 32 distinct patent families, customers in 35 countries and revenue growth projections of 18 per cent for 2004, they really needed the space.

StemCell Technologies grew out of the Terry Fox Laboratory's B.C. Cancer Foundation's Media Preparation Service at the B.C. Cancer Agency, and today is a leading biotechnology company with a focus on developing, manufacturing and marketing specialized cell culture media and cell separation products for the global life science research community.

"We like to think of ourselves a local success story," says Dr. Eric Atkinson, director of corporate development. "Since our inception, StemCell has generated more than $100 million of revenue, most of which has been injected directly into the B.C. economy. And we are very thankful for the help we received from Western Economic Diversification Canada."

A long-term WD client, StemCell received loan funding in 1994 to update its former facilities to international standards.

Expanded research laboratories in StemCell Technologies' new facilities allow the company to continue to develop leading-edge biotechnology products for international markets.

Photo courtesy of StemCell Technologies.

In 1996, the Department helped them hire a recent graduate under the **International Trade Personnel Program** and in 1998 helped the company hire two researchers under the **First Jobs in Science and Technology Program**.

StemCell Technologies' lead product, MethoCult® is regarded as the industry standard for assessing blood-forming cells from sources such as bone marrow and cord blood.

"The success of our specialized cell culture products has solidified the company's reputation as the primary source of specialized media products for stem cell research," adds Dr. Atkinson.

All told, StemCell has developed about 400 distinct new products. The company distributes more than 20,000 catalogues around the world annually. The shipping department goes through 35 tonnes of dry ice annually, and they are one of FedEx's top customers in Western Canada.

The new Vancouver facilities offer StemCell more room to explore research and development opportunities and to grow the company. And you should see the view from the lunchroom!

For more information about StemCell Technologies, call (604) 877-0713 or visit www.stemcell.com.