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Frederick's DynPort gets contract for vaccine work overseas

Akoni Biosystems receives \$3M NIH grant

by Chris Huntemann | Staff Writer

A pair of Frederick biotechnology companies received good news recently, including one company which was contracted to provide services to Great Britain's defense agency.

DynPort Vaccine Co. of Frederick said it received a \$987,888 contract late last month from the U.K. Ministry of Defense to scope the requirements for achieving licensure of a plague vaccine in Europe. DynPort will work with U.K.-based ERA Consulting Ltd. to provide expertise on the licensure of the plague vaccine.

"We're anxious to see other countries express interest in protecting their citizens," said DynPort President Robert V. House on Monday. "We want to help them develop strategies to license these vaccines in their respective countries."

The vaccine candidate is designed to provide protection against the plague bacterium *Yersinia pestis* in aerosolized form and is currently in phase 2 clinical trials, DynPort officials said in the statement.

House, who last year was named Frederick County Executive of the Year by the Tech Council of Maryland, said his company has previously worked on medical countermeasures for federal agencies in the United States like the U.S. Department of Defense.

Scientists working at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick in Frederick originally identified and developed the vaccine, according to DynPort information. The product is currently under clinical investigation and has not been licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or any other regulatory bodies.

DynPort has about 110 employees at its Frederick location and has received contracts from other federal agencies in the past, including a \$32.3 million contract in 2008 from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases to create a phase 1 clinical trial unit for infectious disease therapeutics.

Meanwhile, Akonni Biosystems of Frederick last week was awarded a \$3 million grant from the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda. The grant will allow Akonni to advance development of its multi-drug resistant and extensively drug-resistant genotyping test through pre-clinical testing at several of Akonni's field sites worldwide, according to company information.

Akonni, which has 32 employees in Frederick, has worked with NIH on previous projects related to influenza and tuberculosis diagnostics, according to Kevin Banks, Akonni's vice president of sales and marketing. He said Monday that the grant will allow the company to extend some of its previous work in helping to treat tuberculosis, he said.

"We can extend our platform to look at more strains of tuberculosis," he said, adding that similar work is also done by the company to treat influenza.

"As more drugs come out more drug-resistant strains are popping up," he said.

The grant follows other good news for Akonni Biosystems in the last two months. In August the company won a \$435,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health to develop a low-cost, point-of-care system to diagnose multidrug-resistant strains of mycobacterium tuberculosis. Also in August the company received a U.S. patent for its method for rapidly purifying nucleic acids, according to company information.

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