

The New Zealand Herald

Section C3 – Tuesday February 15 2005

Ingenuity behind blood product

15.02.05

by Liam Dann

A biotech partnership between the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) and private company Kiwi Ingenuity will have its first commercial product launched in Australia this week.

The Kiwi Ingenuity research team, led by Professor Steve Henry, has developed a molecule that will improve the accuracy of blood-group testing machines around the world.

Called Securacell, the quality-control process has been licensed to Australian Stock Exchange-listed pharmaceutical company CSL.

The special molecule, developed during the past eight years in the AUT biotechnology laboratories, can carry specific blood-type characteristics and be inserted into cell membranes.

Cells can then be created which carry exact numbers of molecules. Those cells are then used by the blood-grouping machines or lab technicians to test the accuracy of their work.

In nature, there is no such cell that has a specific number of molecules and can, therefore, guarantee a specific reaction.

Henry said Securacell would enhance the safety of blood supply and blood transfusion processes.

Kiwi Ingenuity has a profit-sharing agreement with AUT and is based at AUT, but is funded by private "angel investors".

Henry said Kiwi Ingenuity was a "spin-in" rather than a "spin-off" of AUT. It began as a stand-alone company before partnering with AUT to take advantage of its scientific resources.

The Australasian launch of Securacell was just the beginning for the partnership's technology.

Kiwi Ingenuity was working on licensing deals in the US, Europe, Japan and Russia, and these would hopefully be in place by the end of the year.

Australia represented just 2 per cent of the potential global market for Securacell. Although that was quite small, it was a significant step for any biotechnology company to successfully commercialise a product, said Henry.

Securacell represented about 5 per cent of the company's total intellectual property portfolio.

Henry said licences for a second product were already being negotiated but those details were being kept under wraps until deals were in place.