SA biotech on cusp of global commercial breakout

StemBioSys has completed research validating that its core stem cell expansion technology, CELLvo Matrix Plus, can predict the safety of cardiac drugs in early-stage development.

That milestone is expected to expand the San Antonio-based company's commercial viability nationally and internationally, and help expedite new drug development.

"This finding, at its most basic, will change how we test drugs for safety before they ever get into a human being. That's what this is," StemBioSys CEO Bob Hutchens told me.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has been searching for a better way to test drugs for cardiac safety. That pursuit dates back decades, when Hutchens said there were some "very famous failures."

One of the challenges has been finding enough heart cells to test. The research by StemBioSys and Cartox Inc., the Michigan-based biotech it acquired earlier this year, recently published by peer-reviewed journal Nature Scientific Reports, concluded that their jointly developed Matrix Plus platform enables the widescale testing of experimental drugs via cardiomyocytes derived from human-induced pluripotent stem cells.

Furthermore, the technology expedites the maturation of such cells.

"We are on the precipice of changing how drug toxicity testing is done globally and being an integral part of that change," Hutchens said.

StemBioSys, which was launched in 2012, is working with six companies involved in drug development, and half of them are international. All of them could benefit from StemBioSys' advancements.

Hutchens said the FDA is fully aware that there are drugs that could be safe but are failing current tests. As such, the agency looks to utilize the Matrix Plus technology to improve delivery of safe drugs to market that might otherwise never make it.

"The ultimate goal is a more accurate test. What this means from a commercial standpoint as we look to 2021, is that there is a significant opportunity for us to take this business to a very different level," Hutchens said. "We've gone from selling products to researchers to something that could be an integral part of the drug development cycle."

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