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BRONZE | VIDACARE

Less-Painful Biopsies

By SHIRLEY S. WANG

For many cancer patients, the pain of a bone-marrow biopsy can add to the anguish of the diagnosis and treatment.

Vidacare Corp. aims to ease that pain with the OnControl Bone Marrow System. The Bronze winner of The Wall Street Journal's Technology Innovation Awards, and winner of the Medical-Devices category, the product allows doctors to more quickly and precisely take samples from inside the bone.

The Winners

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Biopsies of bone marrow, the spongy tissue and fluid that helps make red and white blood cells, are used to detect and monitor such conditions as leukemia and other cancers of the blood. Bone marrow also is extracted from healthy individuals to donate to patients who need transplants.

But for decades, marrow has been extracted by doctors using strong force to manually insert a needle deep into the bone. Patients sometimes have to be stuck several times if the needle isn't properly inserted.



Vidacare

OnControl is used in bone-marrow biopsies.

The OnControl device, which is already on the market, bores like a household drill into the so-called intraosseous space inside the bone. When the device reaches the correct point in the bone for the sample, changes in resistance and how the motor sounds offer cues for the doctors. It's a faster process, with less pain, and the quality of the samples raises the likelihood that just one puncture will be needed, according to Mark Mellin, chief executive of the privately held, San Antonio, Texas-based company.

Darlene J.S. Solomon, a competition judge and chief technology officer at Agilent Technologies Inc., in Santa Clara, Calif., calls the innovation a "superb contribution."

"We're learning that bone marrow is an increasingly important bodily material," says Dr. Solomon, who adds that the product has the potential not only to make biopsies easier for patients, but to lower the barrier to marrow donations by healthy individuals for transplants.

The product was based on the earlier success of Vidacare's EZ-IO Intraosseous Infusion System, which allows for quick and easier intravenous administration of fluids, also by penetrating inside the bone. The EZ-IO device was the Gold Winner of The Wall Street Journal's 2008 Technology Innovation Awards contest.

After the success of the IO device, Vidacare began thinking about other medical opportunities inside the bone that could be aided with a power device, and they saw one for a product that extracted bone marrow rather than infusing fluid, according to Mr. Mellin.

—*Shirley S. Wang*

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