

Children's Mercy center's research gets personal

Focus is on treatments based on genetic makeup
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MEDIA

Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics is aiming to boost a potentially profitable corner of the region's biotech industry: development of pediatric drugs.

The push is coming through the hospital's **Center for Personalized Medicine and Therapeutic Innovation**, which next month will shine an international spotlight on the area's expertise. The draw is a three-day conference in Kansas City focusing on the topic of treating children based on individual genetic makeup.

Later this year, the center expects to open what is tentatively being called the Personalized Medicine Clinic. The clinic will seek genetic clues as to why young patients do not respond as expected to medications.

Spurring entrepreneurship and commercial development in the region is a key focus of the Center for Personalized Medicine, according to its director, Dr. Stephen Spielberg. The specific aim is to build a cluster around the advancing scientific discipline of tailoring drug treatment for patients based on their body's basic building blocks.

This is a science, for instance, that can trace a child's adverse reaction to a medication to the absence or excess of a particular enzyme.

"So this is an area where the long-term and the medium-term and even the beginning, short-term commercialization of products is very real," Spielberg said, "and certainly (this is) something we are very cognizant of and the hospital is committed to."

The business possibilities extend beyond drug-makers, he said, to companies that make diagnostic kits and research organizations that test and evaluate drug candidates.

More broadly, Spielberg said, getting down to this level of detail in patients can reduce medical costs by eliminating some of the guesswork that goes into treating conditions. He also said it can make for more efficient clinical trials by pinpointing the best candidates.

Madeira Therapeutics LLC is one local company that is in the business of making drugs for children. The Leawood-based company, incorporated in 2007, specializes in reformulating off-patent adult drugs into liquids to better control dosages for children.

CEO Pete Joiner said the company hopes to launch three products between 2012 and 2014, with a combined potential annual revenue of more than \$250 million.

Joiner said the Center for Personalized Medicine and Therapeutic Innovation is a “perfect fit” for Madeira.

Information coming from the center, he said, can help the company identify specific populations in need of medications.

The room for growth in the local pediatric biotech market is huge, Joiner said.

“For the Kansas City region,” he said, “it is totally untapped.”

MEDICATIONS FOR KIDS

Area drug developers aren't thinking small when it comes to the pediatric market.

“We really want to establish this region as a national hub for therapeutics in children,” said Scott Weir, director of the [Institute for Advancing Medical Innovation](#) at the University of Kansas.

The institute is spending about \$300,000 a year, in collaboration with Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, to reformulate adult drugs for pediatric use and to get them ready for manufacturing.

The effort began last year, with the development of two drugs to treat cardiovascular problems, including high blood pressure.

The partners are in the process of selecting two more drugs to work on this year, Weir said.

Creating drugs for children has been done here before, said Michael Beckloff, president of [Beckloff Associates Inc.](#), an Overland Park drug-development consulting firm. He said a local collaboration about a decade ago produced a drug that helps premature babies breathe.

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