

Business

City firm finds markers for colorectal cancer

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By Martin Cash

WINNIPEG'S Miraculins Inc. has identified six protein biomarkers that can be used for an early-stage test to diagnose colorectal cancer.

The Winnipeg company's mandate is to create better cancer diagnostic tools in areas with unmet needs. It recently concluded a test with 200 blood samples through the Fox Chase Cancer Centre in Philadelphia, producing encouraging results.

Christopher Moreau, newly appointed CEO of Miraculins, said there is still plenty more work needed before a test could be available on the market. But he said the results show the company is on the right track.

The Miraculins results used a group of protein markers to correctly distinguish samples that were positive for cancer from those without cancer. The test was successful in identifying 90 per cent of the samples that contained cancer; however, it accurately ruled out only 40 per cent of the samples that did not contain cancer.

Moreau said further refining of the test ought to yield even better results. Miraculins has to go through the process of identifying the pure proteins that were used as markers. To produce an effective diagnostic tool, the company would then need to develop an antibody that would bond only to those proteins so that the presence of those proteins would be easily observed.

Moreau said Miraculins is pleased with the results so far because the medical community is lacking an effective early-stage diagnostic tool for colorectal cancer.

He said the current one that is commonly used does not identify cancer presence at the same rate as Miraculins' and it is only usable when the cancer is at a more advanced stage.

Those tests then lead physicians to order a colonoscopy, a test that can produce very conclusive results regarding the presence of cancer.

But it is considered a very invasive and expensive procedure and one that many patients do not want to do if it is not necessary.

"If we can create a diagnostic tool that can identify the people who really need to have a colonoscopy done, that would make a real difference," Moreau said.

In addition to the colorectal cancer diagnosis Miraculins is even further along the process of identifying proteins for a prostate cancer diagnosis.

It also owns the technology to embark on similar research to create early stage diagnostic tools for gastric and breast cancers.

The market for diagnostic tools is about \$30 billion internationally and is growing by about 15 per cent per year.

Miraculins stock was up three cents on Tuesday to close at 56 cents.

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