

## Regional alliance forms to promote life sciences in Mexico

By CHRISTINE MEADE, The Daily Transcript

Friday, June 20, 2008

Representatives of Cuernavaca, Irapuato, Guadalajara and Monterrey, the four Mexican regions partnering to form the Life Sciences Gateway Initiative, are working to shine the spotlight on Mexico's life science industry to help promote discoveries in demand of proper recognition.

The regional alliance partnered with University of California-San Diego and Merck Sharp & Dohme 16 months ago in the effort to bring a higher volume of high paying life science jobs to the four Mexican bioclusters.

Within the bioclusters, Cuernavaca specializes in research, Irapuato is the largest ag-biotech cluster, Guadalajara has been called the "Silicon Valley" of Mexico and Monterrey is the hub of Mexico's technology and clinical research.

According to Xavier Soberon of the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, there are many discoveries being made within these clusters lacking the resources to process new products.

"A recent discovery we made is from the saliva of the vampire bat, which creates a blood clotting inhibitor but it was 10 years after the discovery that clinical trials were agreed to. It is now in phase three clinical trials in the U.S. and Europe," said Soberon.

Soberon hopes the gateway initiative will provide networking opportunities with outside partners that can lead to faster development of products. In his experience, the path to development has started to become a little easier in recent years.

The key to easing that path is through making stronger connections with institutes and companies outside of the Mexico. One of those untapped networks is San Diego, which could serve as a springboard for new Mexican companies with help from local leadership, according to moderator Simon Goldband of UCSD.

"San Diego is a natural yet underdeveloped partner in Mexican life sciences," said Goldband. "It could bring a lot of talent to Mexico and we are currently working on collaborating with San Diego on a few mega-projects."

Panelist Alfredo Herrera believes Mexico is also a natural location for the development of new life science products because of its biodiversity.

"We are number one in the amount of different indigenous plants we have and number two in amphibians," said Herrera. "We are currently working on the genomic sequencing of maize, scorpions and peyote."

Panelist Gregorio Cuevas of the Western BioCluster Region believes their alliance will have the capability to change the Mexican culture as they enhance their ability to export knowledge and improve the quality of their research and products. Yet, sometimes knowledge and natural resources are not enough.

"The major problem we have is where to find new technology for our university and research centers," said Cuevas. As the infrastructure of many research and development centers in Mexico struggle to improve, Jose Borbolla of Tecnologico de Monterrey Medical School affirms that Mexico maintains the quality and standards of the US or Europe but Mexico has the added advantage of more patients for research and more room for clinical trials. Many US clinical research locations are over-booked.

"Regions either have strong clinical research facilities that are full of red tape or developing countries that have more freedom but primitive infrastructure or not enough researchers," said Borbolla.

Slowly but surely, Mexico is developing faster turnaround time on new products in clinical research through the alliance and partnership with UCSD and Merck.

"Mexico has a number of internationally renowned scientists with plenty of discoveries to offer to the US and globally," said Soberon. "We are willing to work with everyone."

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