



Harvard heavy hitters launch new venture

Mass High Tech: The Journal of New England Technology - February 23, 2007 by [Ryan McBride](#) Mass High Tech
A stealth-mode biotechnology startup in Cambridge claims it has radically sped up the method used to identify potential vaccines, yet its founders -- well-known researchers from Harvard Medical School and blue-chip investors from two venture capital firms -- are still keeping a lid on how the technology works.

In the coming weeks, Genocea Biosciences Inc. plans to open its first official office and launch a website to describe what co-founder David Sinclair, an associate professor of pathology at Harvard, calls "a revolution" in vaccine technology.

Sinclair and other co-founders declined to explain inner workings of the technology, but did reveal the technology involves the use of a high-speed screening system that within days -- rather than the months, or even years, it can take now -- can identify which of a disease's thousands of proteins, or antigens, would elicit an immune response in humans.

Such antigens are the active ingredients in many vaccines, yet previous methods of detecting antigens effective in combating diseases have taken some vaccine developers years and many millions of dollars to find, company officials said.

"It's a paradigm-shifting technology," said Sinclair, a scientific adviser for Genocea. "It's not just an improvement over what has existed -- it will change how vaccines are developed."

Darren Higgins, a co-founder of Genocea, has spent the better part of the last decade developing the company's technology, early on at the University of California Berkeley and most recently as an associate professor of microbiology and molecular genetics at Harvard Medical.

Backed by Lux Capital in New York and Waltham's Polaris Venture Partners, Genocea was officially incorporated last summer and has operated under the radar as it builds a management team and research staff, said Robert Paull, a founder and managing partner at Lux who serves as the young company's CEO.

Keeping to the company's stealthy ways, Paull declined to say the amount Lux and Polaris have invested in Genocea or even the number of people employed at the biotech. Among the people involved in the company, he would only identify himself and his fellow founders.

The other co-founder from Lux is veteran life sciences executive and investor Larry Bock, who has been involved in launching more than 10 companies, including Cambridge biotechnology firms Vertex Pharmaceuticals Inc. and Ariad Pharmaceuticals Inc.

Polaris' Kevin Bitterman, a former student of Sinclair's at Harvard, where he earned a doctorate in genetics, is handling his firm's investment in Genocea.

Polaris also helped launch Cambridge's Sirtris Pharmaceuticals Inc. -- a company based on technology discovered by Sinclair that is developing drugs to treat aging-related diseases and attracting global attention.

Genocea's launch comes as the vaccine market is ascending to new heights.

Analysts predict the vaccine market will hit \$10 billion this year and reach \$15 billion by 2012, according to a report issued this month by the New York office of Kalorama Information, a researcher of medical markets.

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