

San Diego Startup Company To Commercialize UCSD Technology To Treat Shock And Inflammatory Diseases

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Thanks to a UCSD center focused on commercializing laboratory discoveries of faculty members, the university has granted a license to a San Diego startup company for technologies that hold promise for the treatment of shock and acute inflammatory diseases. The advancement of the technology was facilitated by the William J. von Liebig Center for Entrepreneurism and Technology Advancement, which during its four years of operation has provided seed grants of up to \$50,000 to fund 44 promising faculty projects. The center has facilitated the advancement of technology that has resulted in the successful licensing by UCSD of 12 of those technologies to new or existing companies. Those enterprises pay royalties to UCSD and have themselves raised about \$40 million in investment capital.

Under an agreement developed by UCSD's Technology Transfer and Intellectual Property Services, the latest von Liebig-inspired start-up, Inflammagen, received the right to commercialize specific patented discoveries of bioengineering professor Geert Schmid-Schönbein. The professor, a member of the National Academy of Engineering and an expert on inflammation, has spent decades examining the chain of cellular reactions that occur during shock, an often fatal condition that develops rapidly after a severe injury, burn, infection or other severe trauma. Experiments by Schmid-Schönbein and his collaborators at the Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Sciences in La Jolla, CA, have shown that the body's potent inflammatory reactions themselves can cause death. Just as important are experiments that have shown that blocking the formation of blood-borne mediators of inflammation in shock can increase survival rates dramatically in laboratory animals.

"If we can stop the runaway chain of biochemical events involved in shock, even for just a couple hours, we may be able to save tens of thousands of lives a year in this country," said John Rodenrys, chief executive officer of Inflammagen. "There is also mounting evidence that inflammation is the underlying cause of diseases such as arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, coronary artery disease, and even some cancers. We will be exploring technology developed by Schmid-Schönbein to both treat these diseases and possibly prevent them from developing."

The licensing agreement provides worldwide rights to the inventions to Inflammagen during the life of the longest running patent covered by the agreement.

Schmid-Schönbein will serve as an unofficial advisor to Inflammagen, but he will not be employed by the company. "I am primarily interested in continuing to do fundamental research at UCSD," said Schmid-Schönbein. "My interest in this venture is primarily to offer help through this new company to people around the world who suffer and die from shock and other acute inflammatory diseases."

During an informal meeting involving UCSD faculty and investors, Stephen F. Flaim, an advisor to the von Liebig Center, introduced Schmid-Schönbein to Rodenrys, senior managing director of Leading Ventures, a La Jolla venture capital firm that specializes in promising, early stage technologies. "Rodenrys's strong business and commercial development experience in medical devices is a perfect match to Schmid-Schönbein's technology," said Flaim. "The union of these two individuals is likely to result in a very successful venture."

Flaim and seven other von Liebig advisors have been drawn to the von Liebig Center's mission of accelerating the commercialization of discoveries made at UCSD and the Jacobs School of Engineering. The von Liebig Foundation gave a \$10 million gift to the Jacobs School of Engineering to establish the von Liebig Center in 2001, and the center provides seed grants and a range of free services to faculty members. Often those services include simply exchanging ideas between faculty and industry representatives who have successfully commercialized new technology. "A lot of what our team at the von Liebig Center does is build relationships," said Stephen Halpern, managing director of the center. "We're starting to see the fruits of those efforts."

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