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Texas Biomed's Taiwan deal a global endorsement for SA institute

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A Taiwan drug development company, TheVax, has enlisted Texas Biomedical Research Institute to help advance its work on a new vaccine for hepatitis B.

The deal could lead to a breakthrough in preventing a disease that affects some 250 million people across the world. It could also draw further international attention to San Antonio's Texas Biomed and its efforts to become a more globally recognized center of excellence for research in infectious diseases.

Officials with TheVax approached Dr. Robert Lanford, director of Texas Biomed's Southwest National Primate Research Center, about the need for nonhuman primates for their late-stage testing; the work at hand will involve baboons. The company was intrigued with Lanford's more-than three decades of work in hepatitis B virus research and by the institute's development of a prior HBV vaccine that's been used worldwide to prevent infection and resulted in two generations of people who are immune to the disease.

Lanford said TheVax had developed a novel vaccine in an attempt to cure chronic HBV infection and had generated compelling data using mice genetically engineered to mimic the infection.

"However, mice are not a good predictor of the immune response in humans," Lanford said. "The next step was to examine the immune response to their vaccine in primates."

While the San Antonio institute won't see direct financial gain from the commercialization of the vaccine, the collaboration represents a path to more potential national and international deals — some of which could prove more profound.



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Texas Biomed's Dr. Robert Lanford helped broker a deal with Taiwan-based TheVax that could lead to more international research opportunities in San Antonio.

"The main benefit for our institute is the potential to be involved with future studies," said Texas Biomed's Chris Chen, co-investigator on the project with Lanford.

"Nearly a million people die every year from complications arising from chronic HBV infection. Currently, there is no cure, so there is an urgent need for therapeutics," Chen said. "Texas Biomed is a great fit for this collaboration because of our focus on infectious disease research and our strong history in the field of hepatitis."

Lanford expects the deal with the Taiwan company will have a far-reaching impact on global health and on Texas Biomed.

"Every time we conduct a scientific collaboration with a company, we anticipate that the first study is part of a long partnership," he said. "Companies often bring their technology to us for proof of efficacy, but they are also coming to us because we have developed a new technology."

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