

Cashing in on discovery:

U start-up develops new research device

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A company formed by three U researchers and graduate students developed a new protein printer that shortens drug-discovery time and cuts research costs. Wasatch Microfluidics, a biopharmaceutical company, created the Continuous Flow Microspotter, which uses channels smaller than a human hair to deliver protein samples that produce concentrated spots on the surface of glass slides used for genetic and pharmaceutical research. "(The device will) allow pharmaceutical researchers to get faster and better results," said Josh Eckman, vice president of business development.

Current drug-discovery research and genetic testing is expensive and difficult. "We know our product isn't going to cure cancer, but we hope that it can help a variety of researchers in different fields help find cures," said Bruce Gale, assistant professor in mechanical engineering and co-founder of Wasatch Microfluidics. The new device will allow more samples to be created from less material and will provide easy and relatively inexpensive access to needed technology, Gale said. The new device produces spots 86 times better and faster than the current technology, Gale said. The better spots will help medical researchers speed the discovery of cures for diseases such as diabetes, Alzheimer's, cancer and HIV.

The microspotter is meant to help other researchers; the device's creators hope it can be used in a variety of fields to help find cures for such diseases, he said. "We want to develop this technology to help good people doing great things," Gale said. The device has received praises from biotechnology companies and is undergoing additional studies to further examine its value to the medical community. "The more we look into the research, the more potential there seems to be," Gale said.

The company hopes to begin selling the device by June or July of 2006. It is the first product to be marketed by the company. Eckman said he hopes it will become the standard in medical research technology. David Myszka, protein researcher and assistant professor in biochemistry, and David Chang-Yen, a doctoral graduate student in mechanical engineering, developed the device along with Gale.

Wasatch Microfluidics was founded in December 2004 as a way to commercialize and market new technology to pharmaceutical and biological research industries.