< Back | Home

Governor Jon Huntsman Jr. sits with Dr. Naresh Trehan of Global Health Private Ltd., Nareen Trehan of Globerian, and Jack Brittain to sign two of four memorandums of understanding on Monday. The memorandums create collaborations between Indian manufacturing companies and the U.

U researchers developed molecular condom for women

By: Lana Groves

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The U is forming an international collaboration with India to manufacture an HIV-preventative gel developed at the U.

Jack Brittain, vice president of technology venture development at the U, is in the process of signing memorandums of understanding that will be the beginning of a dynamic partnership between the U and four companies in India.

"These Indian companies are unique partners for the University of Utah," Brittain said in a statement. "Partnering with Indian companies will allow the university to benefit from their expertise and willingness to engage in collaborative research and development."

The U will be collaborating with Pregna International Ltd., Globerian, Global Health Private Ltd. MediCity and Manipal AcuNova Ltd.

The U is becoming known as an "international leader in research," especially after the Nobel Prize was awarded to Mario Capecchi at the U, Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. said in a statement.

Huntsman and Brittain are in India working on the collaboration process, and they signed the memorandums of understanding with Globerian and Global Health Private Ltd. MediCity on Monday. The last two memorandums will be signed Friday.

By working with Pregna International, the U will gain a new avenue for developing technologies and opportunities for students to receive increased hands-on experience. Pregna benefits from the partnership by access to the U's research and technology development.

Manipal AcuNova Ltd. will offer the U clinical research support that will give U researchers the opportunity to conduct clinical trials more effectively in India. Global Health Private Ltd. is building a research facility that will improve health care in India and provide experience for international students from the U.

The alliance between the U and India will help increase the commercialization of U-developed technologies

and strengthen the American and Indian economies, Brittain said in a statement.

The technology that led to the U-India collaboration was the HIV-prevention gel that was developed in Patrick Kiser's lab. Kiser, an assistant professor in bioengineering at the U, has been working on a method to prevent HIV infection for almost five years.

The HIV prevention, called a "molecular condom," is a vaginally inserted liquid that hardens as a gel to prevent women from receiving HIV from their partners. This molecular condom releases anti-HIV drugs during intercourse when semen touches the protective coating gel.

Kavita Gupta, a doctorate student in bioengineering at the U, has worked with Kiser for almost three years to develop the prototype for the molecular condom.

"My work has involved developing a vaginal ring to prevent sexual transmission of HIV," she said.

Although the preventative drug is still in pre-clinical trials, collaboration with Indian companies will help push the drug forward.

"We're targeting this technology ultimately to help women," Kiser said. "India is greatly affected by HIV infection."

By working with Pregna and other companies, the U could help prevent the spread of HIV, he said.

"It's been great to see that what I'm working on in the lab has the potential to get to market and be of use to people...who need it the most," Gupta said.

l.groves@chronicle.utah.edu
