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UNCW, aaiPharma shake hands on deal for research

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Scientific discoveries by UNCW researchers could be used one day to create lifesaving medications, through an agreement with a Wilmington-based pharmaceutical company.

The technology-transfer licensing agreement is a first for the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and it gives aaiPharma, a local drug company, the right of first refusal when it comes to discoveries by UNCW researchers.



Daniel Baden, director of the UNCW Center for Marine Science, called the collaboration a milestone for the university and an indicator of

the increasingly sophisticated research being done by UNCW students.

"This is a promising arrangement because UNCW is doing the creative discovery research, which we do well," Dr. Baden said. "Then, when compounds are discovered that have potential commercial value, aaiPharma will come in and do what they do best, the product development, patenting and marketing of pharmaceutical products."

When UNCW's Center for Marine Science and the Departments of Biology and Chemistry identify a new chemical entity, it will be offered to aaiPharma. If the company is interested, it would develop the product and market it commercially, said George Van Lear, president of aaiPharma's research division.

"If we pass on it, they're free to take it elsewhere," he said.

This is the company's first partnership with a university, but it already licenses a product from Carolina Health Sciences in Charlotte, Mr. Van Lear said.

He also noted that any product created as a result of the relationship would be financially beneficial for both sides because the company and the university would share the revenue.

Dr. Baden said the university's share would vary depending on the type of discovery and the amount of research required. But he said he expects the partnership to be equitable.

"All partners have to work together to make sure it's successful," Dr. Baden said. "I think it will be a partnership that will yield as much as we each care to put into it."

Research is already under way. For instance, researchers are studying molecules that may be used to develop potentially lifesaving medicines from pharmaceutically active entities

found in coastal waters.

"The students and university scientists will gain valuable hand-on experience working side-by-side with industry leaders," Mr. Van Lear said. "The university will have the opportunity to realize the value of its research program, and aaiPharma will gain access to a generally untapped resource for drug development."

But it could be many years before any of the discoveries would be a commercial possibility, Mr. Van Lear said, stressing that researchers are in

the early stages of discovery.

Products resulting from the collaboration aren't expected to hit the market anytime soon.

"A lot of products that become very successful medicines started as natural products," Mr. Van Lear said.

He added that he views this partnership as an extension of the company's existing relationship with UNCW. That relationship includes the hiring of UNCW graduates, internships and educational opportunities for aaiPharma employees.



STAFF PHOTO | LOGAN WALLACE

Research technician **Susan Campbell** works in the the Marine Molecular Toxicology Lab at the UNCW Center for Marine Science on Thursday.