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National Lab Assists Dental Implant Developer with Technical Problems

Information Sessions Coincide with Next Funding Deadline

By Monica Abeita, Regional Development Corporation for Northern New Mexico Connect

Three New Mexico men – metallurgist Terry Lowe from Metallicum, a subsidiary of Manhattan Scientifics; designer and manufacturer Dan Blacklock from Danlin Products; and dentist and educator Walt Schuman from BASIC Dental Implants — recently collaborated to develop, manufacture, and market dental implants that use an enhanced variant of titanium made by Manhattan Scientifics. Titanium improves the way dental implants are anchored into the jawbone.

But the team needed special equipment and expertise to evaluate and describe the distinctive characteristics of their breakthrough material, which goes by the trademarked name of Biotanium. The partners applied for help from the New Mexico Small Business Assistance program – a joint project of Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories and the state of New Mexico. NMSBA provides technical assistance through expertise from lab scientists and engineers at no cost to small businesses located in New Mexico. The assistance is aimed at solving technical challenges for which there is no solution readily available in private industry.

The three companies received a leveraged NMSBA project, which funds laboratory research for multiple businesses with a shared problem that is too large or complex for an individual project. They were paired with LANL’s Joseph Mang, Robert Dickerson and Marilyn Hawley, who used powerful imaging technology to confirm that the surface features of Biotanium make it an ideal environment for bone cell attachment and proliferation and could promote dramatically faster and stronger recovery for patients than other materials.

“We received two key benefits from NMSBA,” Lowe said. “Data on our product and competitive products helped us to validate our market advantage, and the LANL analyses showed us ways to enhance the benefits of Biotanium implants.”

Lowe anticipated the company will develop additional products — for example joints, spinal devices and cardiovascular stents — based on this new metal, and plans are under way to employ up to 28 people at a manufacturing facility in Albuquerque.

Small businesses can submit proposals for leveraged projects like this one to NMSBA starting May 4 through June 8. The proposal should explain the problem, identify what expertise Los Alamos or Sandia national laboratories offers that can't be found in the private sector at reasonable cost and describe the expected economic benefit to the businesses involved.

Leveraged projects must be completed within one year and are funded at the equivalent of between \$20,000 and \$100,000 in technical assistance.

Businesses wishing to apply for a leveraged project can attend information sessions to learn more about the program. Sessions will be held May 8 in Los Alamos, May 11 in Farmington, May 16 in Santa Fe and Las Cruces, May 17 in Albuquerque and May 22 in Carlsbad. Visit the NMSBA website at www.nmsbaprogram.org for details.

Businesses ready to apply should follow the instructions on the NMSBA website. If the proposal is selected, NMSBA will request additional information due by Aug. 3 and a presentation on Aug. 15 (for Sandia leveraged projects) or Aug. 16 (for LANL leveraged projects). Proposals selected for technical assistance funding will be notified the first week of September.

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