

New medical device firm gets shot in the arm

Anne Bond Emrich
Grand Rapids Business Journal

A new medical device company just set up temporary headquarters within the offices of the West Michigan Science & Technology Initiative in Grand Valley State University's Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences, and with a recent injection of seed funding, it's ready to step up its development and commercialization efforts.

The fledgling TransCorp is developing novel surgical instruments and implants for neurosurgical and orthopedic applications. Its co-founders include David Lowry, M.D., a neurosurgeon at the Brain and Spine Center in Holland; Scott Tuinstra, a physician assistant at the Brain and Spine Center; Roger Veldman, associate professor of engineering at Hope College; and Des O'Farrell, a former mechanical engineer with AutoCam who is now TransCorp's president. O'Farrell founded two diagnostic start-up companies in the past and left his most recent position to run TransCorp's day-to-day operations, while the other co-founders continue to work in their respective positions.

Lowry, Tuinstra, Veldman and O'Farrell are the idea guys, said TransCorp's chairman, Mike DeVries, president of EDF Ventures of Ann Arbor. Currently, everything is in the early development and prototype phase so nothing is



DeVries

ready to test yet, DeVries noted.

EDF Ventures, along with Hopen Therapeutics LLC of Kalamazoo and Grand Angels of Grand Rapids, provided TransCorp with seed capital.

DeVries and Lowry met a while back through a mutual friend, and Lowry told DeVries about some of the surgical device concepts he had in mind.

"I told him that whenever he wanted to get a company going to let me know, and he did," DeVries recalled.

Lowry has a proven track record in coming up with ideas worth pursuing, and he understands what it takes to get a medical device concept from the drawing board to the marketplace, DeVries said. Lowry previously co-founded Northstar Neuroscience, a neuro-stimulation company headquartered in Seattle.

TransCorp is working on several surgical device applications simultaneously, Lowry said, all of which are the product of the four co-founders' combined imaginations and expertise. He said some of the applications are further advanced than others and that TransCorp's first surgical device will likely hit the market in 12 to 18 months.

Lowry and DeVries would only say that what is novel about the surgical device, and the ones to follow, is that it's minimally invasive, so it improves patient safety. Lowry said TransCorp is choosing to say very little about the product while it awaits patent approval.

DeVries put together a business plan for TransCorp, figured out how the company would use its

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►►

TransCorp gains hold in area

◀ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

proceeds and how it would be financed going forward. He had connections with Mark Olesnavage, president of Hopen Therapeutics, and Mike Jandernoa, co-founder of Grand Angels and general partner in Bridge Street Capital Fund. DeVries interested the two of them in investing in the new company, as well.

Olesnavage, who serves on TransCorp's board of directors, is also CEO of Metobolic Solutions Development Co. of Kalamazoo and former executive vice presi-

dent of Perrigo Co. of Allegan. Jandernoa is former chairman of Perrigo. Lowry personally invested in the company, too, but DeVries would not disclose how much all the parties involved invested in the venture.

EDF has made investments in start-up companies all over the country.

"It's very similar to what we're doing with TransCorp: We find either a doctor or an engineer with a good idea, we put some seed capital in, and then we go and raise additional capital from additional sources," he explained.

The Western Michigan and Northwestern Indiana areas are probably the biggest suppliers of medical device products in the world, so it makes a lot of sense for TransCorp to locate here, DeVries said.

"I really think that, given the manufacturing base here and the depth of expertise in both engineering and manufacturing, that West Michigan is a very good place to begin these kinds of ventures," Lowry added. "I think that will become increasingly the case as the medical infrastructure here continues to mature."