

## **LANL, UNM Join Isotope Expertise with Focus on Medical Treatments (Albuquerque Journal)**

By Jackie Jadrnak, Journal Staff Writer

Combine Los Alamos National Laboratory's muscle at creating isotopes with the University of New Mexico's medical research expertise, and what do you get?

With any luck, a new enterprise that can add a productive element to the biotechnology economy, as well as create new ways to diagnose and treat diseases.

Representatives of those two institutions joined with Gov. Bill Richardson on Tuesday to announce their collaboration in the New Mexico Center for Isotopes in Medicine.

"The current thinking is that it will focus on research and development of new products," said John Pieper, interim director of the center and dean of UNM's College of Pharmacy.

Terry Yates, UNM's vice president for research, said this will be the only center of its type in the country. Only one other laboratory— Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York— has the capacity to produce a certain type of isotope that involves light metals, and it isn't doing it, he said.

Isotopes are forms of the same element— magnesium, carbon or hydrogen, for example— that have different weights because of varying numbers of neutrons in their atoms. Many of them decay quickly, so the production facility needs to be located relatively close to where they will be used.

Isotopes can be developed to bind or cluster with certain materials that make up our bodies. By doing that, they can deliver medical treatments to an area where they are needed or light up under certain imaging systems, identifying a cluster of cancer cells, for example.

UNM's College of Pharmacy had the nation's first centralized radiopharmacy to make and distribute radioactive drugs, according to UNM President Louis Caldera.

One research project that might benefit from this new center has come up with a small molecule that carries a radioactive label and interacts with lymphoma cells, said Jeffrey Norenberg, the center's interim deputy director and director of radiopharmaceutical sciences at UNM's College of Pharmacy.

Information gained from that particle can help predict a lymphoma cell's likelihood to multiply and spread around the body, he said.

Pieper said the center is looking to state and federal lawmakers for funding, which he hopes will total \$2 million to \$3 million a year. Besides funding, the item at the top of the agenda is to hire a permanent director, he said. Pieper said they are looking for an internationally known person who can attract other top-quality scientists.

At a news conference in Richardson's office, the officials noted that when Richardson was energy secretary he made sure LANL got money to build the isotope production facility there. Richardson said he hopes this partnership will establish New Mexico as a biotechnology center and create many high-paid jobs here.

The hope is that, as different useful isotopes are discovered, spin-off companies will be developed to market the new products.

Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute will help with some pre-clinical testing of new products, with some clinical testing centered in UNM's MIND Institute and its Cancer Research and Treatment Center.

TCI Medical also will play a role in marketing and distributing new discoveries.