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The Online News Source for Los Alamos

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Headline News

LANL and UNM sign isotope agreement

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Gov. Bill Richardson hosted a signing ceremony in the Capitol to mark a new partnership between Los Alamos National Laboratory and the University of New Mexico in the field of medical isotopes. Laboratory Director Pete Nanos and UNM President Louis Caldera participated in the signing Tuesday.

"For too long, the academic institutions in New Mexico have been on the outside looking in at educational partnerships and opportunities with the lab," Richardson said in a prepared statement.

LANL and the University of California have responded to concerns by state officials in recent years that the state was not receiving the benefit of the laboratory's high-tech jobs and research. The lab has been actively firming up a series of collaborative arrangements with New Mexico universities in the last several months.

The newly created New Mexico Center for Isotopes in Medicine will make use of technological capabilities at the lab's isotope production facility. The center will conduct programs for developing new drugs and other products, including preclinical and patient testing.

Medical isotopes are used in medical screening technologies and in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer and other illnesses. Some of the isotopes have a short period of usefulness before they decay, so supplies must be continuously renewed.

The UNM Health Sciences Center will expand educational programs to develop trained workers in the new field.

The laboratory's Isotope Production Facility (IPF) came on line early last year. It makes use of a particle accelerator beam at LANSCE (Los Alamos Neutron Science Center), which can be used to produce more than 35 medical isotopes and has an international clientele.

In his remarks, Nanos described UNM as a special partner. The Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions will not only enhance the economy of New Mexico, but will also help develop a new generation of radiochemists at UNM, he said.

Terry Yates, UNM's vice president for research and development, said this morning that the program was a big deal for the state and the country.

"There is nothing like it in the country," he said.

"Nobody else is producing these kind of isotopes, the light ones requiring a proton beam to make, and nobody is linked up with a world-class radiopharmacy program like ours."

Among other benefits, the collaboration will provide joint faculty appointments, joint research proposals and projects, and additional UNM interns at LANL.

The center will be located at the UNM Cancer Research & Treatment Center, the UNM MIND (Mental Illness and Neuroscience Discovery) Institute and the UNM School of Medicine.

The arrangement also includes private partnerships with Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute, Technology Commercialization International Inc. and other New Mexico businesses.

Richardson said he was pleased to see the arrangement take shape.

"As Energy Secretary, I pushed for funding for the technology that helped LANL create one of the largest isotope production facilities in the world," he said.

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