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San Antonio company at the forefront of stem-cell therapy

Laura Garcia | Aug. 15, 2019 | Updated: Aug. 16, 2019 12:28 p.m.



StemBioSys President and CEO Robert Hutchens talks about the company's objectives during an interview at the Research and Development offices, Monday, Aug. 12, 2019.

Photo: Jerry Lara, Staff / Staff photographer

A San Antonio-based company that makes stem cell products is hoping to raise \$3 million from investors and turn its focus to boosting sales.

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company's research and development office, located in the South Texas Medical Center.

“There’s huge potential in the stem cell space to heal diseases,” he said.

The science behind StemBioSys can be confusing to the public, but basically the privately held company has patented an “extracellular matrix” technology, or ECM, to make products that scientists can use for cutting-edge biomedical research.

Chief Operating Officer Sy Griffey describes the company’s core product derived from human bone marrow cells as a sort of native “home” for cells.

The company claims that its CELLvo-branded products closely mimic the physical, structural and biochemical “microenvironment” found in the human body, which allows for better results in a petri dish.

“You get more cells and you get better cells when you work with our technology,” Hutchens said.

The product is constructed by cells in standard tissue culture vessels, which takes six to eight weeks to manufacture at a 1,000-square-foot lab on the BioBridge Global campus in San

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StemBioSys was founded in 2010 by dermatologist Dr. Steven Davis and Dr. Xiao-Dong Chen, who developed the ECM technology at UT Health San Antonio.

Early on, the company got the support of BioMed SA, a nonprofit advocate for the local biomedical and health care industries. In 2013, the City Council voted to invest \$200,000 in StemBioSys through a grant from the San Antonio Economic Development Corp.

The company currently has a dozen employees and a board of directors that includes John W. Feik, founder of DFB Pharmaceuticals, and Cathy Burzik, former CEO of wound care company Kinetic Concepts Inc, which sold for \$6.1 billion eight years ago.

Since 2016, StemBioSys has raised more than \$12.4 million, according to regulatory filings. Hutchens said the proceeds are largely from local investors. So far, the company has raised \$1.8 million in its third fundraising round.

Among its customers, two companies in Europe are using StemBioSys products for their drug discovery programs, while another customer uses the product to study tissue regeneration.

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The company could also play a part in the growing field of regenerative medicine — the replacement or regeneration of human cells, tissues and organs. Some of the initial research in the field took place in San Antonio, said Dr. Stephen Badylak, a pioneer in the field.

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Badylak, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh and deputy director of the McGowan Institute for Regenerative Medicine, will be honored for work next month at a BioMed SA event. He's also collaborated with StemBioSys for more than two years.

Badylak said the San Antonio company's matrices had molecular qualities that could potentially direct cell behavior to regenerate cells rather than create scar tissue.

"It's pretty cool stuff," he said. "The beneficiaries of this, of course, are the patients. Every trial that we do is better than the one before it."

He is developing a procedure for treating patients who have suffered major injuries, including battlefield wounds, by implanting biomaterial harvested from pigs.

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of reconstructive surgery.”

In San Antonio, Travis Block, a principal scientist at StemBioSys, has used the matrix to look at what causes aging in cells and whether the damage can be reversed.

Hutchens said he’s open-minded about the company’s future. He’s betting that the collaborations with academic institutions and other bioscience companies around the world will eventually lead to new uses for its ECM products.

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“There may be some a-ha, whiz-bang application that we would never in a million years have thought of in the four walls of this company, and that could become the big value driver,” he said.

Laura Garcia covers the healthcare industry in the San Antonio and Bexar County area. Read her stories and more local coverage on our free site, mySA.com, and on our subscriber site, ExpressNews.com. | laura.garcia@express-news.net | Twitter: [@Reporter_Laura](https://twitter.com/Reporter_Laura)

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