

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **World-first drugs testing research**

UTAS researchers have created what appears to be a world-first in testing for pharmaceutical drugs.

The MilliSpot™ polymer-based technology, created by Professor Emily Hilder of the Australian Centre for Separation Science, enables researchers to test a pinprick of blood (rather than a vial of liquid blood) with greater ease and sensitivity than other absorbent materials can provide.

Prof Hilder said a similar technique is used on newborn infants, where a prick of their blood is stored on a piece of paper and tested for metabolic disorders. This has been done since the 1940s and is effective in diagnostic testing.

“The pharmaceutical industry has realised this paper technology works really well and have begun to test it for drug development,” she said.

The benefits of this product are that tests require less blood, and it is easier to test humans who have less blood such as children. Also as the blood is dried it is not hazardous, which makes testing for things such as HIV safer.

Because the drug testing is more complex than those done on newborns, storing the blood on paper was not reliable enough.

“We need something better than paper and that’s what MilliSpot™ is – a porous polymer-based material,” she said.

The MilliSpot™ materials provide a two to three times more sensitive response than that achieved from paper.

The technology is progressing through the stages of being granted a patent, with the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) releasing the International Preliminary Report on Patentability (IPRP) indicating that all claims of the patent application appeared to be novel and inventive. This bodes well for progression of the application through national phases.

A series of national patents would mean the MilliSpot™ would have a higher value for potential investors.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Professor Paddy Nixon congratulated Prof Hilder and her team for their remarkable achievements.

“This research just goes to show that UTAS is a front-runner in research with real-world application,” he said.

“The MilliSpot™ material has the potential to make a real difference not just in pharmaceutical research but in a number of scientific areas. In this day and age it is difficult to invent a product that is truly novel and inventive, so this recognition by the PCT is a significant achievement.”

The research team is working with UTAS commercialisation partner UniQuest Pty Limited to prepare the technology for a global market launch.

The team has also recently been awarded a \$49,680 Skills and Knowledge grant from Commercialisation Australia to define the capital requirements for manufacturing scale-up versions of a product based on the technology. The next step is to secure potential investors.

Dr Robin Fieldhouse, the UniQuest Manager of Innovation and Commercial Development, said the two achievements were positive “de-risking” markers that potential investors would recognise as enhancing the value this innovation could bring to global health care.

“These milestones mean we can offer commercial partners a particularly viable and exciting opportunity. It’s a ground-floor entry to introducing an analytical materials technology that could help the pharmaceutical industry maximise a whole new range of operational and cost-saving benefits,” he said.

Currently, UniQuest is engaging with prospective industry partners with a view to forming a start-up company that will develop MilliSpot™ into customer-ready products for the multi-billion dollar preclinical drug development market.

**For more information/interviews please contact Dr Hilder on 6226 7670.**

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