

New firm developing drugs that combat addiction

By *Kathleen Gallagher* of the *Journal Sentinel*

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A Milwaukee-area entrepreneur has formed a new company to develop drugs to fight addiction.

Addiction Therapeutix Inc. will use compounds licensed from the Medical College of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to develop therapies for people who can't kick alcohol, painkiller and nicotine habits and their related side effects, said Frank Langley, the new company's president and chief executive officer.

Langley formed the company as a wholly owned subsidiary of MPP Group LLC, a Wauwatosa drug developer he started in 2007. The move creates a more focused company with a specific expertise that appeals more to potential investors, Langley said.

"People who invest in early-stage companies are looking for a very focused plan, and that's what Frank is doing here with Addiction Therapeutix," said Brian Thompson, president of the UWM Research Foundation.

The company forged an exclusive option agreement this month with the Medical College for a morphine-related compound. Called dextro-morphine, it shows promise blocking addiction to pain relievers, heroin and nicotine, Langley said.

Leon Tseng, a retired Medical College anesthesiology professor, discovered that promise, said Dennis Devitt, director of marketing and licensing in the college's technology development office.

"We think putting it in the hands of a company focused on addiction is an excellent match," said Devitt, who told Langley about the compound.

Just in the area of pain relievers, about 50 million Americans suffer from chronic pain, Langley said. The challenge for physicians is to relieve that pain without patients becoming addicted to the treatment, he said.

Addiction Therapeutix also absorbed a group of compounds MPP had licensed from UWM. Those compounds appear to interact with certain neurotransmitters in the brain to block the euphoric effects of alcohol without inducing anxiety or sedation, Langley said.

MPP kept those compounds it is developing that are not related to addiction, including one that is related to brain function, he said.

Putting all of the addiction compounds into a single company and giving it a name that immediately signals what it's doing is a good move, said Brian Renk, executive director of BioForward, a membership organization that represents Wisconsin's biotechnology industry.

"It makes it even stronger to have more targets. Then you don't have a one-compound company that can get blown out of the water by things like regulatory issues or market concerns, even problems with early testing or in clinical trials," Renk said.

Cambridge Major Laboratories in Germantown has synthesized the active pharmaceutical ingredients of Addiction Therapeutix's lead compounds for alcoholism and a related anxiety condition, Langley said. The company is doing preclinical studies with those ingredients, he said.

"We have results on three of the four lead compounds, and they showed a significant reduction in alcohol drinking in animal studies," Langley said.

Addiction Therapeutix is in discussions with other academic centers about possibly licensing more addiction-related compounds, he said.