

# Blood boost for Cambridge firm

by Tony Quested

A CAMBRIDGE Science Park bio company has received a fresh boost in its bid to take a global lead in enabling risk-free blood transfusion.

ProMetic BioSciences Ltd has developed the P-Capt prion reduction filter in collaboration with the American Red Cross and French medical company, Macopharma SA. The P-Capt® filter cleans blood prior to use by removing the prion responsible for variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD).

The technology in question enables biomolecules to be captured very specifically and in this application it stops vCJD from being transmitted through blood transfusions and could soon be in use across the UK.

A Bill to ensure that "the blood supply is made safe through the implementation of prion filtration" has been passed at the House of Lords and now continues its Parliamentary progress in the Commons.

Lord Morris' Bill is a direct consequence of the Archer Report, which was highly critical of the UK government's handling of blood safety - notably in relation to people suffering from haemophilia who are dependent upon blood products for their entire life.

ProMetic executives have hailed the Bill for raising the level of awareness for the safety of the UK's blood supply and was encouraged that it was being "acted upon at the highest levels of government."

Regardless of what the Commons decides, the prion filter will likely be used to improve the safety of blood for children. Now the campaign is being stepped up to ensure the technology is extended to all individuals.

As Business Weekly reported near the end of last year, ProMetic's technology was also recommended by the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO) - an independent committee that advises the UK Department of Health - who indicated that the P-Capt® prion reduction filter should be adopted to pre-treat red blood cells destined for children born since January 1, 1996.

Despite receiving CE mark approval as long ago as September 2006 and having already completed two clinical trials, the SaBTO recommendation is subject to the completion of the PRISM study, a multi-centre clinical trial initiated in 2007 to evaluate the safety of the technology. The 540-patient study is scheduled to conclude soon.

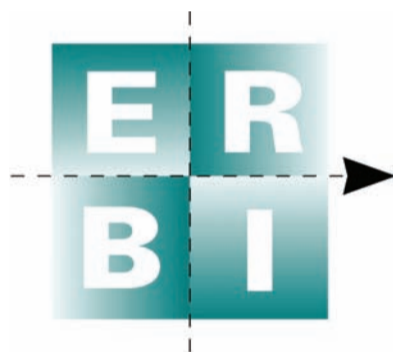
According to ProMetic Biosciences CEO, Dr Steve Burton, NHS adoption of the technology is then dependent on a commitment from the Department of Health to fund the roll-out of the technology.

The total cost of introducing P-Capt® is estimated to be around a pound per person in England if adopted for all blood that is transfused.



Dr Steve Burton

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Dr Burton said that although a successful launch of the technology in the UK would not lead to an immediate increase in headcount at PBL's Cambridge R & D base, its longer-term prospects would be "significantly enhanced."

Thirty people are currently employed at the company's Cambridge Science Park laboratories. And it is anticipated that the company's manufacturing operations will see the bulk of near-term growth.

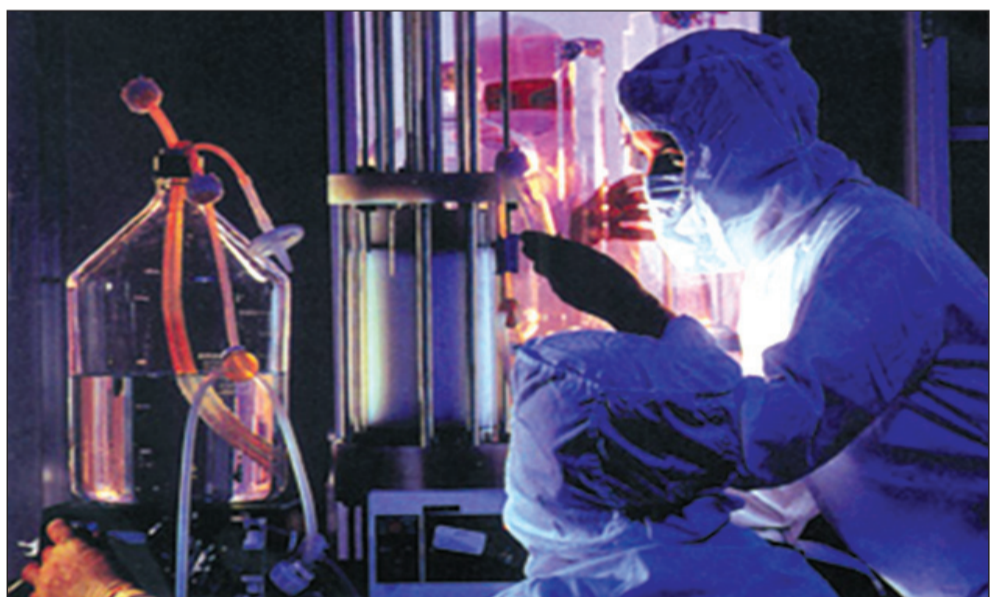
Dr Burton added: "The announcement from SaBTO was important in itself, but may drive demand in other European countries that have experienced cases of vCJD and look to the UK as a barometer on this issue.

"We have drawn tremendous encouragement from Lord Morris' Private Members Bill getting through the Lords which adds to the momentum building to have prion-filtered blood made available to all individuals - not just children.

"The Bill has further raised public and political awareness of the need for safe blood transfusions for all and we will be reinforcing this message at the Patient Safety 2010 Conference, to be held in London on February 4, where the keynote speaker is Sir Liam Donaldson, chief medical officer of England."



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