PANEL POISED TO INVEST $50 MILLION

Medical composites field set to evolve here

BY ROY WENZL
The Wichita Eagle

By the end of the year, the Kansas Bioscience Authority is set to decide whether to invest $50 million over 10 years to create a new hip replacement industry jointly invented by aircraft and medical scientists.

The new industry could have its roots in Wichita.

The project as currently planned would be a combined venture of Via Christi, the National Institute for Aviation Research at Wichita State University and the University of Kansas.

Inventing a new generation of flexible hip replacements could relieve the pain of hundreds of thousands of aging baby boomers.

It could also bring new jobs to the city.

If funded, the Center of Innovation would develop artificial hips and other joints from lightweight composites, or resins, similar to those already being developed here for the aircraft industry.

The Kansas Bioscience Authority met with researchers at WSU and Via Christi for two days last week and left "clearly impressed."
with what they heard, said Tom Thornton, president of the
authority.

The authority was created in 2004 by the Kansas
Legislature. It aims to give Kansas a stronger research
base for bioscience and spur economic development in
related high-tech fields.

The research partners are developing a business plan to
present to the authority in July, when it sets its budget for
2009.

A final decision on whether to proceed, how to divide the
work and where to locate the center could be made by the
end of the year.

Wichita's part

Wichita researchers want the center to be located here,
and they have made their
case to the state that many
practical-minded scientists
could make this work for
WSU and the aircraft industry.

"It makes good sense that an
industry-focused model idea
like this one should probably
be located where the industry
is located," said the authority's
Thornton. "Wichita has a lot of
engineers and medical people
working in close cooperation
with industry."

The University of Kansas has
eminent scientists too, he said,
including Paulette Spencer, a
pioneer in developing compos-
ite materials used in dental
and bone work.

"Research might be KU's
chunk of the pie," Thornton
said.

The state has asked WSU,
NIAR, Via Christi and KU
to develop joint business
plans.

"A key question we hope
they can answer is, can these
organizations cooperate effec-
tively?" Thornton said.

The goal, he said, is not to
create winners and losers
among regions of the state,
but to come up with the best
idea possible to benefit the
industries and people of
Kansas.

Mike Good, research busi-
ness operations director at Via
Christi, said the group will
write a business plan asking
the authority for up to
$50 million over 10 years to

invent and develop the indus-
try.

The plan will also require a
sizable investment from busi-
ness.

Wichita," Thornton said after
the meeting.

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