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Young bio companies at research forefront

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [Giannina Smith](#) Staff Writer
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ZENDA TECHNOLOGIES INC.

As the baby boomer generation continues to age, the number of patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease is expected to increase dramatically in years to come.

A test developed by [Zend Technologies Inc.](#), however, is allowing for earlier detection of the troubling disease — giving sufferers a chance to slow the disease's progression through drug therapy before serious symptoms occur.

"So many patients are diagnosed with latter stages of Alzheimer's disease because there is no scan today to help to diagnose the mild cognitive impairment that is a symptom of Alzheimer's disease," said

Lawrence Catchpole, president and CEO of Zenda Technologies.

Zenda was founded in 2007 by Michelle LaPlaca of the Georgia Tech School of Biomedical Engineering, and Dr. David Wright from the Department of Emergency Medicine at Emory University's School of Medicine. The emerging company is now in the process of developing and commercializing the IMTech platform to assess patients at risk of mild cognitive impairment, or MCI, a condition in which memory, language or another mental function is below normal. DETECT is Zenda's first test on the platform. Originally developed to detect MCI in athletes that may have suffered a concussion, DETECT allows doctors to track the cognitive decline associated with the early stages of Alzheimer's disease by running patients through a 10-minute battery of visual and auditory stimuli, which includes pictures and words that assess cognitive abilities, such as reaction time and memory capabilities, in relation to the patient's age.

Administered through a visor-like headset to create the proper testing environment, DETECT is an alternative to the 90-minute paper and pencil test currently used to test for MCI.

"What we do is something that is akin to a virtual reality sort of an environment that slips over the eyes and ears so sounds and visuals come through a headset attached to a simple computer," Catchpole said. "We create that quiet room anywhere."

Catchpole said Zenda has been able to accomplish the majority of its goals up to date with a mere \$1.65 million in grant money, which came primarily from the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation and the Georgia Research Alliance (GRA). Since finishing a 400-patient study at the end of July, Zenda is in the process of raising more venture capital that will be necessary for the product's launch with a goal of acquiring \$4 million to \$8 million.

Although DETECT will initially be used as to test for possible early signs of Alzheimer's

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disease, in the future, Catchpole sees the opportunity for much more.

“We’d like to develop other tests for syndromes and diseases,” he said. “I think the potential is there for [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] and depression.”

CELTAXSYS CORP.

Celtaxsys Corp. is creating new drug compounds to fight disease by manipulating immune cell movement in the body. Founded in 2005, the company is creating drugs for cancer, as well as inflammatory and autoimmune diseases, by studying the migration of immune cells and the therapeutic opportunities it may offer in attacking disease. The company’s technology is able to control the presence of immune cells depending on the disease being targeted.

“Our compounds manipulate the migration of immune cells,” said Bill Reddick, Celtaxsys president.

When it comes to cancer, the compounds prevent immune cells from being repelled, allowing them to engage the tumor, Reddick said. With inflammation, Celtaxsys’ compounds drive away immune cells from the local environment, resolving the inflammation symptoms, he said.

“We are creating drugs which allow immune cells to identify and attack the underlying disease ... specifically cancer and tumor cells,” Reddick said.

Originally organized around technology licensed from the Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, Celtaxsys has grown to develop its own platform focused on immune cell migration and has established a portfolio of more than 40 chemical and biological agents that can induce cell-type specific “chemotaxis,” defined as the purposeful movement of cells toward, or away, from a chemical or biological agent.

Incorporated in Georgia, Celtaxsys is currently based in the Advanced Technology Development Center at Georgia Tech. The company has a total of 10 employees, eight of which are involved in pre-clinical discovery research and development.

So far, Celtaxsys has raised almost \$10 million in funding — \$5.7 million in 2005 and an additional \$3.7 million in 2008 — from equity investors. Currently the company is in the process of validating its drugs in animal models and hopes to begin human trials in 18 months.

ARUNA BIOMEDICAL INC.

Founded by a University of Georgia professor, **Aruna Biomedical Inc.** is creating stem cells to be used in research initiatives by life science companies.

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