

Avanca develops more one-handed syringes for clients

New Mexico Business Weekly - July 6, 2007 by [Kevin Robinson-Avila](#) NMBW Staff

Avanca Medical Devices Inc. is ready to inject a new line of surgical syringes into operating rooms nationwide.

The Albuquerque-based company -- which sells a unique, single-handed syringe that it licensed from the University of New Mexico in 2004 -- is developing new products and expanding its markets, thanks to the economic strength and management talent of Los Angeles-based Global Medical Solutions Ltd.

GMS paid \$1 million for a 51-percent stake in Avanca last year, giving the fledgling startup fresh resources to license more technology from UNM and others, and to improve on current products, says Dr. Wilmer Sibbitt, a physician at UNM's Health Sciences Center and Avanca's chief scientific officer.

"Things are going very well since GMS invested in the company," Sibbitt says. "They've brought tremendous resources for us to improve and diversify our medical devices."

Sibbitt invented Avanca's original single-handed syringe, known as a reciprocating procedure device (RPD). Unlike conventional syringes that require two hands for procedures, the RPD allows surgeons to use their second hands to steady patients. That makes procedures easier, reduces the likelihood of complications, and decreases the pain experienced during surgery.

Before GMS stepped in, however, Avanca only had enough funds to produce a single-size 10 cc syringe, says Jay Simon, president and chief operating officer of both Avanca and GMS.

"Many physicians want 3 cc or 5 cc syringes, but Avanca didn't have the molds to make those sizes, much less market them," Simon says. "Now we have a complete line of syringes with 1, 3, 5 and 10 cc sizes. We also re-designed the product to make it more ergonomically comfortable and aesthetically pleasing."

Avanca will receive its first inventory of 100,000 syringes in mid-July, which it will market for just \$1.50 per syringe, Simon says.

"At that price, nobody's blinking an eye," he says.

And, with more than 10 million syringe-based surgical procedures per year in the U.S., Avanca expects high-volume sales.

Moreover, GMS has leveraged some of Avanca's operating costs by providing warehouse space and accounting services. GMS is a global provider of nuclear medicine and imaging products and services, with operations in eight countries, Simon says.

GMS also improved Avanca's marketing strategy. Under the previous management hired by Sibbitt and his associates, Avanca had directly targeted surgeons to test syringes and order shipments but, in modern medicine, physicians often don't make those decisions, Simon says.

"Instead, we're targeting pharmaceutical companies and large distributors in the medical industry," he says.

With the first syringes ready for market, Avanca is expanding its roster of medical devices. The company licensed a new, complementary technology developed by Sibbitt from UNM in June. The device -- a container for drugs that surgeons inject during procedures -- is made to snap on to Avanca's reciprocating syringe. That will allow pharmaceutical companies to pre-fill containers with drugs and sell it as a single package with the RPD, Simon says.

Separately, Avanca licensed a patented dental device from a doctor in Albuquerque for dental irrigations, Sibbitt says.

"With the new dental device, the drug holder, and the development of smaller syringes, we now have a much broader line of products," Sibbitt says. "All that makes the company much more valuable."

Lisa Kuuttila, president and CEO of UNM's Science and Technology Corp., says the university is also benefiting from Avanca's success because new medical technology developed at UNM is getting to market and the university is earning royalties.

"The company is introducing a whole new series of products for specialized procedures," Kuuttila says. "After three years, Avanca is really taking off."

Avanca is one of 30 startup companies formed since 1997 with UNM technology, including seven new startups that formed just in fiscal year 2007, Kuuttila says. The STC has licensed more than 100 technologies in the same period, including two new licenses it signed in June with TenthGate International (see related story on page 1).

Avanca, which is headquartered in downtown Albuquerque, has one full-time employee now. The company expects to hire up to five more employees in the next year, Simon says.

krobinson-avila@bizjournals.com | 348-8302

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.