

Profs pool tech expertise to start consulting firm

By JEFF STACKLIN

Two Case Western Reserve University professors have teamed with a pair of Harvard University professors to form a consulting firm that will review and validate the complicated technology of upstart biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies.

The company, Triaj Inc., has offices in Cleveland and Boston. It markets itself to venture capitalists and other investors in biotech startups, as well as to government agencies and universities that would hire the firm to evaluate their technology and its potential for success.

Triaj has brought together a cast of top biotechnology experts to help explain the technology to clients, said Jay R. Faeges, an attorney at the Cleveland firm Goodman Weiss Miller LLP. Mr. Faeges is one of six founding partners involved with the firm.

"There is simply not this kind of scientific expertise outside of academia," Mr. Faeges said. "We're able to bring to the table the highest level of experts available across multiple disciplines" of biotechnology, he said.

The company already has two clients: Celera Genomics Group, a Rockville, Md., company that mapped the human genome,

and financial services conglomerate Fidelity Investments.

Mr. Faeges said Triaj has agreements that prohibit it from divulging the scope of work it is doing for the two companies. Triaj already has attended one biotech conference to begin marketing itself and will attend other conferences, Mr. Faeges said.

At the core of Triaj is chief scientific officer Robert C. Elston, a senior genetic statistician and professor in CWRU's Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Dr. Elston received his doctorate in animal breeding from Cornell University in 1959 and is considered a pioneer in the field of biostatistics, said Triaj CEO Lyle J. Palmer.

"Robert is one of the guys who shaped gene discovery as we know it today," Dr. Palmer said.

Dr. Palmer, a faculty member at Harvard Medical School, received his doctorate in pediatrics from the University of Oxford in 1998 and did post-doctorate studies under Dr. Elston at CWRU. Also from Harvard is Dr. Isaac Kohane, a pediatric endocrinologist and bioinformatics specialist. Dr. Kohane currently serves as director of the Children's Hospital Informatics program at Harvard and is an associate professor of pediatrics at the university.

Another partner in Triaj, Sudha K. Iyengar, is an assistant professor in the Epidemiology and Biostatistics Department at CWRU and is director of the department's Genotyping Laboratory. Dr. Iyengar, a molecular geneticist, received her doctorate in human genetics from the University of Pittsburgh in 1992.

The four academic partners, through their professional acquaintances, have assembled a cast of about 40 academics from universities worldwide who have contracted to work as consultants for Triaj. As consultants, they will provide even greater expertise for specific niches within biotechnology, Dr. Elston said.

The other partners in Triaj are Mr. Faeges and David I. Leow, an investment banker from Singapore.

Stephen Kahane, a physician and the vice chairman of VitalWorks Inc., a provider of health care data management services in Ridgefield, Conn., said he believes Triaj has latched on to a unique

concept. Dr. Kahane, who became acquainted with Triaj through Mr. Faeges, said the major consulting firms lack the high level of expertise Triaj has assembled. Such expertise is necessary to understand what biotech companies are about and if they are valid.

"The whole biotech sector is one that needs help and guidance," Dr. Kahane said. Triaj "is the kind of organization that can deliver that value," he said.

Beyond the six partners, Triaj's only employee is Bill Brodnick, who will begin today, Oct. 22, as its chief financial officer. Mr. Brodnick previously was senior vice president of finance and accounting and chief administrative officer at

telecommunications company CoreComm in Mayfield Heights. He also was vice president of finance and treasurer at Aironet Wireless Communications Inc., a company based in Bath Township that was bought in November 1999 by computer networking giant Cisco Systems Inc.

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