

Record Q1 drives E&Z to target €50m 2006 sales

The core nuclear medicine and therapy segments of Frankfurt Prime Standard-listed Eckert & Ziegler Strahlen- und Medizintechnik provided two thirds of first-quarter sales growth – up by 32% to €11.3m (\$14.1m), while the new radiopharmaceutical segment achieved a sales rise of €1.1m. The Berlin, Germany company expects sales for the whole of 2006 to reach €50m.

This record quarterly sales total was accompanied by a 40% rise in profits after tax, which was due mainly to a better-than-expected contribution from radiopharma.

Nuclear medicine sales were boosted by 20%, following the first-time consolidation of the sales of newly-acquired US company Analytics, and Czech company Sorad.

Eckert & Ziegler's recent successes include last month's winning of a €1.3m tender to deliver the cancer detection radiodiagnostic, FDG, to the Marie-Curie-Hospital, in Gliwice, Poland, one of the country's largest nuclear medicine centres.

That followed receipt of permission from the Berlin authorities to produce the new prostate cancer tracer [18F]-fluorethylcholin at its radiopharmaceutical production site in Berlin-Adlershof. Used in conjunction with PET, the agent can trace very small masses of tumour, says the company.

Eckert & Ziegler's 280 staff at sites in Berlin, Milan, Paris and Prague (Europe); Los Angeles and Atlanta (US); and Chennai (India) specialise in cancer therapy, nuclear medical diagnostics and measurement technology.

The company's sales in 2005 totalled some €42m (+18%), with tumour radiation equipment and prostate cancer implants providing much of the growth. Board chairman Dr Andreas Eckert said: "We developed our strong position with encapsulated sources of radiation and implants, established a new engine of growth with tumour radiation equipment and got into the expanding market for radiopharmaceuticals."

Biomet gains Cytomedix' platelet therapy patent

Biomet Biologics, Biomet's subsidiary that develops platelet concentrate systems, has gained access to a key patent held by Cytomedix, the specialist in autologous platelet-based treatments for chronic non-healing wounds.

Under the terms of the agreement, Biomet will pay Rockville, Maryland-based Cytomedix \$2.6m upfront, as well as \$100,000 each quarter for the next three years, in exchange for a worldwide non-exclusive licence to Cytomedix' Knighton patent for all applications of its autologous platelet releasate therapy, except for use in the chronic non-healing wound market.

In addition, Cytomedix will also receive from Biomet royalty-free licences to certain Biomet patents related to platelet gel products.

ART buys cataract diagnostic tool

Advanced Refractive Technologies (ART) has broadened its offerings to the cataract market with the acquisition of what it believes to be the first lens-focused cataract detection device. The technology, developed at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, is designed as a simple, 15-second test in which the patient's lens is scanned and readings indicating the level of cataract development, will then be given. ART, of San Clement, California, gained the technology through the all-stock purchase of OptiMetrix Technologies, the Los Alamos company which had the exclusive licence to the device.

Quest bulks up with Focus purchase

Quest Diagnostics has agreed to acquire Focus Diagnostics, a veteran in the infectious disease testing services arena, for a cash sum of \$185m. The move is expected to expand Quest's product offerings and strengthen its position as one of the leading players in the medical testing industry, says the Lyndhurst, New Jersey company.

The acquisition will add \$65m to Quest's annual revenues and is unlikely to hurt profits for 2006, excluding anticipated charges relating to the transaction, the firm forecasts.

Founded in 1978 as Microbiology Reference Laboratory, privately-held Focus offers laboratory testing services and manufactures its own diagnostic products for infectious and immunologic diseases. The Herndon, Virginia firm says it spends around 9% of its annual sales on R&D to "continually fuel innovation", and it has served as the initial entry point for several infectious disease tests in the US including, Lyme disease, human Parvovirus, West Nile virus and SARS, the company claims.

Focus also has a pharmaceutical testing subsidiary, Focus Bio-Innova, which is not included in the acquisition. The transaction is expected to close in the third quarter of 2006.

Acrongenomics, Molecular Vision in BioLED pact

Acrongenomics, a Swiss nanobiotechnology company, and Molecular Vision, a UK company spun-out from London's Imperial College, are teaming up to develop and commercialise "lab on a chip" products based on the latter's BioLED technology for the burgeoning personalised medical testing market.

The technology, invented by Molecular Vision's founders, combines microfluidics with organic semiconductor polymer to enable the development of low-cost, easy-to-use and readily portable point-of-care diagnostic products, capable of running multiple tests on the same test microchip and producing results in 2-3 minutes, claims Acrongenomics.

The joint collaboration will initially focus on developing the technology for diabetes management, sexually transmitted diseases, cardiovascular diseases and substances of abuse. The technology could also be extended to other applications including, among other things, drug discovery, forensics, biodefence and food diagnostics.

Under the agreement, the companies will share R&D tasks and split potential revenues from commercial products resulting from the project.

CardioDynamics win Premier contract

San Diego, California-based developer CardioDynamics is to be the sole supplier of impedance cardiography (ICG) systems, used to monitor cardiac function, to Premier Purchasing Partners. The deal is part of the company's new three-year, multi-source contract with the US group purchasing organisation for noninvasive cardiology equipment.

NAS, Novation in brachytherapy deal

North American Scientific (NAS), the Chatsworth, California-based radiation therapy company, is to be one of two firms to supply US group purchasing organisation Novation with its Prospera 1-125 and Pd-103 brachytherapy seeds, which are used primarily in the treatment of prostate cancer. The dual-source contract is effective on July 15. Further details of the agreement were not disclosed.