

## BIOTECH

# Blood pressure test progress

## in Christchurch

Tamlyn Stewart

Biotech company Canterbury Scientific has partly completed a study that could result in earlier detection of pre-eclampsia in pregnancy.

The company is one year into a two-year research project partnering with Canterbury Health Laboratories and the University of Otago, Christchurch, working on a diagnostic test method to identify pre-eclampsia earlier in pregnancy.

Pre-eclampsia is characterised by a rapid rise in blood pressure that is potentially fatal to pregnant mothers and their babies and is usually detected about 20 to 32 weeks into a pregnancy.

Canterbury Scientific chief executive Neil Pattinson said this collaborative research project was a new strategy for the company which had initially "focused on its knitting" – the development and production of a stable haemoglobin A1c control (HbA1c) for

diabetes monitoring, and establishing its global market.

Now it had that in place the company was in a position to expand its current business and portfolio of products, Pattinson said.

The research was building on work by Cambridge University professor and Canterbury Scientific director Robin Carrell that was published in science journal *Nature* in 2010.

The biotech company expects the research could lead to a new product for diagnostic laboratory tests which could be distributed through its existing international customer network, which includes Roche and Siemens.

Canterbury has invested nearly \$250,000 in the research so far, and has been trialling three different approaches.

Canterbury Scientific director Maurice Owen said the research had already intrigued multinational companies.

"It's certainly caught the inter-

est of some multinational diagnostic companies overseas – as soon as they saw the initial publication ... they emailed and spoke to Professor Robin Carrell within a few days.

"So it's the sort of test which is wanted out there and there is no single test out there that does what this test promises potentially to do."

It was too early to say when the diagnostic method and control would be ready for commercialisation, or what impact it could have on the company's revenue, but Pattinson said the collaboration with Canterbury Health Laboratories and the universities of Cambridge and Otago was itself invaluable.

"Our immediate return is the relationship building."

Canterbury Scientific might not end up fully owning the commercialised product, but its contribution to the intellectual property involved would secure a return.

"As long as we've had a

significant input, and added to that [intellectual property], and if we can be in a position where we as a company are making the controls for this particular assay then we've also secured a future return for New Zealand from a long-term perspective as well," Pattinson said.

Last year the company forecast its \$3 million revenue would likely grow to \$5m by 2013. It invests about 20 per cent of its annual profit into research and development.

The company had hired three additional staff in the past year, bringing the total to 14, and was looking to hire another two.

**Testing time:** From left, Dr Maurice Owen, scientific director at Canterbury Scientific, Professor Stephen Brennan, University of Otago, Christchurch, Dr Aiwu Zhou, scientific consultant to Canterbury Scientific, Darrell Wang, University of Otago research fellow, and Dr Neil Pattinson, Canterbury Scientific chief executive.

