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Vystar may help medical pros avoid latex allergies

By Allan Maurer

ATLANTA—If you are a doctor or a nurse and develop an allergic reaction to the latex, it can end or limit your career. Vystar Corp., an Atlanta startup has developed a patented technology that reduces the antigenic protein responsible for the allergy in natural latex products to nearly undetectable levels.

Latex allergy, which develops over time from contact, affects up to 17 percent of healthcare workers and 3 percent of the general population. It can cause problems ranging from skin irritation up to the potentially deadly shock associated with other dangerous allergies.

The small company, founded in 2000 by Travis Honeycutt, has raised \$7 million in private investment since 2004, says Bill Doyle, Vystar CEO.

“The allergy is caused by repeated exposure to natural latex,” Doyle explains.

“There are people who no longer practice medicine because of it. Some get such severe allergies they cannot even be around latex. In the general population, people may know they are allergic to balloons.

Actually, however, people are allergic to the proteins in the natural latex, something even some seasoned nurses did not know when questioned in early focus groups, says Doyle.

Vytex NRL says Doyle, reduces the levels of such proteins while maintaining the superior product qualities, like barrier protection, strength and durability, fit and comfort, positive environmental impact, and cost, in the vast array of everyday products made with natural rubber latex.

The company is ready to roll out its first products and has signed a manufacturing agreement with Revertex Malaysia, the world’s largest producer of certain types of natural rubber lattices and latex compounds.

One of the “nice things about the business,” says Doyle, is that the company does not have to create a giant infrastructure to make and market the product.

It has also contracted with a U.S. manufacturer of condoms and straight-dipped gloves to develop products made with Vytex NRL and complete the biocompatibility tests for 510(k) submission to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

It also signed almost 20 sampling agreements and evaluations with major manufacturers in the exam and surgical glove, foam, medical device, and condom industries.

Doyle says the company expects to make its first sale this year and establish sustainable sales in the first two quarters of 2009.

He points out that unlike other alternatives to latex, Vystar’s product is not petroleum based. “Latex and Vytex are green products,” he says. “In a landfill, after its used, latex lasts about as long as an oak leaf before it breaks down.”

Vystar was named a 2007 Top 10 Innovative Technology Company in Georgia by the Technology Association of Georgia. On the Web: www.vytex.com