

SU researchers, Incubate.bio team up to understand neurodegenerative diseases

An international partnership between Stellenbosch University (SU) researchers and Incubate.bio, an early-stage European biotech company, has the potential for long-term collaboration that could lead to global breakthroughs in treating neurodegenerative illnesses such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases. The partnership also creates excitement and stimulation for the local South African start-up ecosystem.

This is the sentiment of Dr Raminderpal Singh, CEO of Incubate.bio (<http://incubate.bio>), which focuses on accelerating drug discovery in neurodegenerative diseases. The company has announced a significant grant for SU's Department of Biochemistry to continue its research related to systems biology of neurodegenerative disorders.

Dr Singh, a seasoned technology leader and business development executive, with extensive global experience in small and large technology companies, says the partnership between SU and Incubate.bio is evolving to capitalise on their existing working relationship.

"Incubate.bio has been able to demonstrate breakthroughs in computational modelling because of its world-class scientists and system biologists – who are all from Stellenbosch University. The Incubate.bio team includes biologists and data scientists with decades of research experience at SU, with a Scientific Advisory Board of current senior academics that includes Dr Dawie van Niekerk, from SU's Department of Biochemistry, and Professor Ben Loos, from SU's Department of Physiological Sciences," he adds.

"It is a privilege to work with globally respected academics and their students. I am confident that research in the field of Alzheimer's etcetera will rapidly progress through close relationships such as this," he says.

Dr van Niekerk, researcher and senior lecturer, says the Incubate.bio grant will go towards scholarship funding for a postgraduate student in his department, giving the student an opportunity to pursue postgraduate studies the person would not otherwise have been able to consider, as well as contribute to research output at the University. "Since systems biology is quite specialised in biology, mathematics and computer programming, this should also serve to entice students to pursue this rapidly growing multi-disciplinary research field."

Dr van Niekerk adds: "Outputs from our research will benefit drug development and further our understanding of mechanisms in the brain. There is still so much that we do not know about neurodegenerative conditions that *in silico* modelling can address."

According to Prof Wim de Villiers, SU's Rector and Vice-Chancellor, this partnership is a clear indication of SU's globally recognised research expertise. "This is research for impact – using our research expertise to change society for the better and to make a positive difference to people's lives."

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