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## PersonaDX shows off lab for cancer tests

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# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## PersonaDX shows off lab for cancer tests

*Firm is one of three spinoff businesses from Roswell Park*

By Fred O. Williams

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PersonaDX, one of three spinoff companies from the Roswell Park Cancer Institute this year, showed off its future lab for cancer tests during an open house in Buffalo Thursday.

Spinoffs have been slower to emerge from the state Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Life Sciences, which opened 18 months ago next door to Roswell Park's gene research building.

However, Gov. Eliot Spitzer said Thursday that he's confident the state's nearly \$100 million investment in the bioinformatics center will pay off eventually in economic benefits for taxpayers — as well as medical advances.

"There will be [spinoffs] in due course," he said. "Innovation doesn't happen on a regimented time frame."

Spitzer was among more than 100 people who attended the open house for PersonaDX in a gleaming new building at the edge of the Buffalo Medical Campus, while a harpist played and waiters offered wine and grilled shrimp.

"This is a great day and the first of many," he said. He disclaimed credit, noting that the state's push to invest in medical research predates his administration.

Former Gov. George E. Pataki announced plans for the bioinformatics center in 2001, anchoring new research facilities for Roswell Park and the Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute. The state led investment in the \$200 million medical research complex that houses the three facilities at Ellicott and Virginia streets. While the push has drawn scientists and federal research money to the area, it has been slower to produce hoped-for spinoff companies and jobs.

State Sen. Antoine M. Thompson said New York's investment in the medical campus should be coupled with investment in infrastructure throughout the city to spur business development.

PersonaDX has developed a genetic test that it says can predict whether a tumor will be the most lethal type that spreads through the body, cofounder Dr. Lionel Coignet said.

The company has four workers now and expects to have as many as 250 in three years, Coignet said. Processing of blood tests should begin after approval for a diagnostic lab from the state Health Department expected early next year.

PersonaDX was first announced in January, marking Roswell Park's first spinoff company. Since then the cancer center has announced two other researchers' spinoff ventures getting under way on the medical campus. They are AndroBioSys, which is looking for therapies for prostate cancer; and Empire Genomics, developer of genetic tests for an array of maladies, including prenatal tests for autism.

The relatively rapid PersonaDX blood test is designed to help patients decide whether to undergo chemotherapy and radiation treatment. Insurers are expected to embrace the test, costing close to \$1,000, because it can potentially save treatment costs of \$80,000 a year, he said. Existing tests require a tumor sample.

Initially PersonaDX will offer tests for breast and prostate cancer. Of the 250,000 people diagnosed with breast cancer annually, 15 percent will suffer "metastatic" or spreading forms of cancer.

"The trouble is, we don't know which ones they are," said Coignet, a Roswell Park scientist. People with a certain gene that regulates cell growth have a less than 1 percent risk of metastasis, while those lacking an intact copy run a 50 percent risk, he said.

The company's test for the gene marks an advance in the development of personalized medicine, which tailors treatment to an individual's genetic makeup, he said.

Also Thursday U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer announced a federal award of \$735,592 to support dental training programs in the area. Of the amount, \$549,834 was awarded to Erie County Medical Center Corp. and \$185,758 went to Health Care Inc. and Roswell Park.

The funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will support pediatric and general dentistry programs and provide financial assistance to students. The training will support a growing need for dentists, Schumer's statement said.

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