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## KU Cancer Center to conduct clinical trial of ovarian cancer drug

By JASON GERTZEN  
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Local ovarian cancer patients soon will begin receiving new treatments, signaling advances both in the fight against the disease and in the region's bioscience aspirations.

The **University of Kansas Cancer Center** on Thursday announced the official start of work to test a new ovarian cancer drug.

The Phase 1 clinical trial marks the first time that a drug developed by KU scientists is remaining here for this development phase.

In this case, it will involve testing in patients at the KU Cancer Center.

"As an oncologist and a clinical researcher, I am very passionate about being able to offer new therapies and hope to all patients with cancer," said Karen Kelly, the cancer center's deputy director.

The drug, called Nanotax, has reached this point through the work of a wide-ranging cast that includes scientists at KU's campus in Lawrence, the **University of Kansas Medical Center** and a spinoff company called **CritiTech**.

The new tests will take place at the **University of Kansas Hospital's** Cancer Center and Medical Pavilion.

"Collaboration is key in the fight against cancer," said Bob Page, president and CEO of the KU hospital. "Discovery of new treatments is so important."

Nanotax puts a twist on a commonly used chemotherapy drug called paclitaxel. Though it is a highly effective cancer fighter, paclitaxel, also known by the brand name Taxol, comes with harsh side effects.

The technology that CritiTech has licensed from the university was developed by researchers such as Val Stella, a distinguished professor of pharmaceutical chemistry; Roger Rajewski, director of KU's Biotechnology, Innovation and Optimization Center; and Bala Subramaniam, a distinguished professor of chemical and petroleum engineering.

The technique essentially involves breaking the drug down into ultrafine bits, called nanoparticles.

That allows the drug to be prepared without a harsh chemical responsible for so many of the side effects in patients receiving paclitaxel.

Over the next year or so, about 20 patients whose tumors have spread to the abdomen and who have no further treatment options will participate in the Nanotax clinical trial.

As a Phase 1 test, the clinical trial will aim to determine the safest dosage of the drug.

CritiTech has received about \$5 million in outside funding so far, said Sam Campbell, president and chief executive officer of CritiTech.

Advanced stages of clinical testing most likely will require CritiTech to work with a large pharmaceutical company or other strategic partner, Campbell said.

This work has important medical implications. The support for the commercial development, however, also sends a signal to other bioscience entrepreneurs that it is possible to pursue their ambitions in the Kansas City area, Campbell said.

"It could have a significant impact on our region's life sciences effort," he said.

Proving that the university has the ability to take a drug all the way from the laboratory to the clinic, a process referred to as "bench to bedside research," also has implications for the effort to win federal designation as one of the nation's top cancer-fighting hubs, said Roy Jensen, director of the KU Cancer Center.

"Nanotax is a milestone in the extraordinary history of drug discovery and development at KU," Jensen said.

Deatta Lackey of Independence offered a more personal perspective on Thursday's announcement.

She is a survivor who now can mark seven years since her treatments for ovarian cancer. Lackey still remembers all too vividly the extreme fatigue, body aches, nausea, sores and other debilitating side effects of her

chemotherapy treatments.

"It is so important to find more treatments for ovarian cancer," Lackey said.

"I don't want to see anyone go through what I went through."

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