



EUROLAB





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Revolutionising South African Oncology

PRODUCTION: **William Denstone**

Eurolab's roots are firmly planted in South Africa, in whose pharmaceutical industry it now has more than 25 years' experience, growing from a company only supplying quality oncology generics into South Africa's largest and most innovative oncology outfit. "Our primary focus has always and will always be on patients," says Eurolab, and this commitment is allowing it to bring new products to market and expand its reach all the time, William Denstone discovers.

// Eurolab brings its trademark innovation and care to all aspects of cancer treatment, therapies and technologies, setting itself apart by being the only oncology company in Southern Africa to adopt a whole-of-cancer approach from diagnosis through treatment.

Eurolab provides oncology medicines that meet stringent quality standards whilst being affordable and always available. The Eurolab Aseptic Unit (ASU) is the only centralized sterile, Grade A cytotoxic mixing unit in South Africa, allowing a sterile product to be accurately measured and dosed to each individual patient.

The company's gene sequencing machine, meanwhile, is a diagnostic tool to assist in a more accurate diagnosis and treatment approach for different forms of cancer. "We have

partnered with local pathologists and haematologists to introduce this machine," says Eurolab CEO Lynne du Toit, "and are currently busy with the validation of it."

"Currently, all South African and African patients who want oncology testing done have to send their samples of tissue, tumours or blood abroad, at huge cost. By bringing in this machine we are able to perform these tests at a massively reduced cost."

Eurolab underpins all these aspects with the very latest international research in immunology and oncology to provide cellular therapies.

GAMMA KNIFE INNOVATION

Another of the crucial factors in its approach is Eurolab's introduction of the cutting edge Leksell Gamma

// THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GAMMA KNIFE CENTRE IN JOHANNESBURG BRINGS SOUTH AFRICA FIRMLY IN LINE WITH GLOBAL STANDARDS //

Knife Icon radiosurgery technology. It is its first application in the Southern Hemisphere and only the fourth in the world, following the establishment of the country's inaugural treatment centre at Netcare's Milpark Hospital.

"The introduction of this advanced technology, which is





Eurolab CEO Lynne Du Toit and General Manager of the Eurolab Aseptic Unit (ASU) Gavin Steel

// WE HOPE TO BE THE FIRST IN AFRICA OFFERING ACCESS TO CAR-T CELLS //

internationally regarded as the gold standard in cranial radiosurgery, and the establishment of the Gamma Knife SA centre, have been firsts for the Southern African sub-continent, said Dr Maurizio Zorio, a neurosurgeon at the chosen hospital.

The technology is used in the treatment of malignant as well as benign brain, head and neck tumours, as well as for the treatment of functional disorders, such as acoustic neuromas, trigeminal neuralgia and vascular malformations.

"Since being introduced in April

2017, we've seen over the initial six-month period that there is great demand for this technology," stated Dr Zorio, "and we are receiving an increasing number of enquiries from both doctors and patients around the country."

"It is really exciting to consider the future potential of the Gamma Knife Icon locally, which has already been used to treat more than a million patients worldwide. The development of this centre in Johannesburg brings South Africa firmly in line with global standards," added Dr Richard Friedland, chief executive officer of the Netcare Group.

NOVEL FORMULATIONS

In line with its unerring policy of innovation, Eurolab is also looking to bring novel formulations into the South African market, in order to

treat rarer forms of cancer. "At our compounding facility, there is a sterile ready-mixed solution being made available to African and South African patients," du Toit tells us. "We have recently received our license, which is a huge step for us, and will allow us to start producing at this facility."

"Right now we are not in production, but we know more or less how many of these formulations we will producing for the South African market. When it comes to Africa, however - this is where volumes will be exponential."

"We are planning to go to production at the end of June," adds the Eurolab Aseptic Unit (ASU) General Manager Gavin Steel. "Given the high-risk nature and the level of technology we will start small, probably until September, and then start scaling up,"



Steel explains, before giving some insight into the technicalities of this process and the efficiencies it affords.

"In a manufacturing environment we are able to generate efficiencies of scale due to the larger volumes which in turn translates into savings for the patient."

EXPLORING MARKETS

"We obviously want to start with the South African market, because it is also novel to South Africa, and then we will expand into the African markets as well."

"We are exploring one market at a time," Du Toit says. "We are currently busy in Tanzania, but we also recently met people who have relationships with the Kenyan market and hospitals there which they would like us to supply to. All these markets will open up gradually as and when we get our facility off the ground."

"Tanzania is our primary target," Steel agrees, "but we have also had a lot of interest from two other countries, namely Botswana and Namibia. Given the close similarities between the regulatory environments we will likely be able to start servicing Namibia in the last quarter of this year."

"Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria will probably be our next targets," du Toit states, "because there are distribution facilities already in place which we can leverage off and the infrastructure is there in terms of hospitals and clinics. This would make it much easier for us to distribute into those countries."

"We have appointed a full-time representative in Tanzania," Steel says, giving us some insight into the process of this expansion, "who then goes to establish relationships with oncologists currently practicing there. From there, we grow the network."

"Perhaps most exciting about this technology is that it allows an oncologist to perform his care through outreach, whereas before it had to be done in specialised hospitals and clinical environments. The centralized mixing facility removes the reliance

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upon specialized infrastructure and equipment at the treatment site. It unlocks very scarce resources in Africa."

CAR-T THERAPY

CAR-T therapy is a completely new type of therapy that uses the immune system to kill cancer cells, and forms the basis of one of Eurolab's key next moves. "When it comes to cancer of the bone marrow or the blood-forming system, there are reasonable treatments available, but one group of patents does not respond to normal chemotherapy - children," Steel tells us.

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"Their life expectancy is curtailed as a result." However, giving hope is the research which has shown that CAR-T cells can remain in the body and continue to be active for a long period of time, meaning that unlike many other blood cancer drugs, CAR-T therapy is designed to be a one-time treatment. In some cases, it has cured people where all other treatments have failed.

"With CAR-T we harvest some of the white blood cells and then genetically enhance the cells, grow them and introduce them back into the patient. The result has been phenomenal, allowing people with very little hope to walk out of a hospital within a reasonable period of time," Steel affirms.

"This therapy is currently only available predominantly in the US,

with a lot of recent activity in Israel. We are in the process of developing the production technology and hope to be the first in Africa offering access to CAR-T cells."

"Using the immune system to fight diseases like cancer is the new horizon, and so having the ability to manufacture that in Africa is very important," Steel concludes on the very latest in Eurolab's long line of patient-centred, highly innovative solutions in the ongoing fight to ameliorate the plight of cancer sufferers in Africa. **Ei**

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