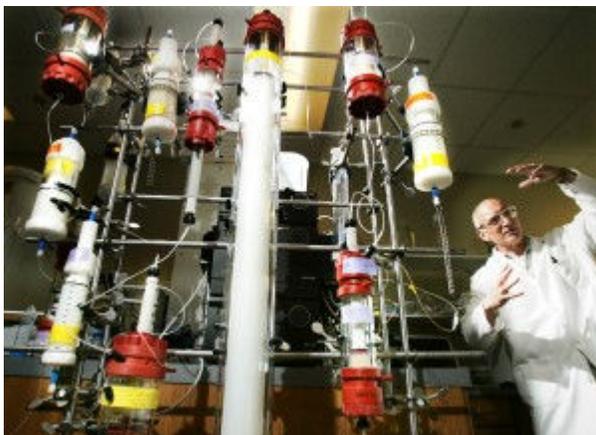


Study lauds value of clinical trials in Wisconsin

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In this August 2007 file photo, Richard Noble of Quintessence Biosciences shows a high-performance liquid column chromatography device used to purify protein. Laura Strong, president of Quintessence, says clinical trials "are a very critical part of being able to bring new drugs to market."

Wisconsin may not be home to any of the major pharmaceutical companies, but they are feeding the state's economy in other ways, by funding clinical trials of promising drug compounds conducted here, according to a study released Wednesday.

And a state organization has been formed to educate the public about the importance of those tests.

More than 2,000 clinical trials of new medications have been held in Wisconsin since 1999, including about 750 in Madison, said the report by Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), a Washington, D.C., organization representing major

U.S. pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies.

"Wisconsin has a good biomedical research infrastructure; the biopharmaceutical companies recognize that," said PhRMA spokesman Jeff Trehwitt. He was in Madison on Wednesday to speak to BioForward, the association representing Wisconsin biotech companies.

Wisconsin is not at the top of the list for clinical trials. Ohio, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and New York have higher tallies, with nearly 5,000 in Ohio since 1999. But Wisconsin is "solidly in the middle," Trehwitt said.

More than half of the medications tested in Wisconsin have targeted "the most debilitating chronic diseases," such as asthma, heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and mental illness, Trehwitt said.

The report did not provide a total economic impact of the clinical trials over the past dozen years, but it did offer some statistics, from a study by Archstone Consulting:

- In 2010, Wisconsin hospitals and clinics took part in 1,311 clinical trials, nearly 9 percent of the 15,134 conducted nationwide.
- In 2008, the biopharmaceutical industry accounted for 6,440 jobs in Wisconsin and supported 36,708 jobs in other sectors in the state. Those employees were paid a total of \$350.3 million.
- Biopharmaceutical firms spent \$114.2 million on research and development in Wisconsin in 2008.

Trewhitt said 190 clinical trials are ongoing in Wisconsin now, about 100 of them in Madison. "There are some patients who are potentially good clinical trial subjects, and they need to know this," he said.

Several Wisconsin biotechs and research centers and BioForward have formed a group, Clinical Trials Education Network of Wisconsin.

"Clinical trials are a very critical part of being able to bring new drugs to market," said Laura Strong, president of Quintessence Biosciences, Madison. But she said few cancer patients participate in them.

There could be a number of reasons, she speculated. "I think some people think this is an untested drug that we know nothing about," Strong said.

"Make no mistake: there are risks," Trewhitt said. But there are also potential benefits, such as getting "very early access to potentially very important therapies," he added.

Trewhitt said more information about clinical trials, as well as a list of those in progress, is available at www.clinicaltrials.gov, a database through the National Institutes of Health.