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New PKU test launched by Irish company

Written by IMN Friday, 15 May 2009 14:45

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Pharma Forum

Enzolve Technologies, a UCD spin-out company, has formally launched its first CE-marked diagnostic test, which screens for phenylketonuria (PKU) in newborn babies.

Enzolve's PKU test, based on engineered enzyme technology, has several advantages over the tests currently available on the market, according to UCD.

The Enzolve PKU kits are available in two formats containing sufficient materials to allow up to 400 or 1,000 newborns to be tested. The products were launched at the 6th ISNS European Regional Meeting in Neonatal Screening, which took place last week in Prague in the Czech Republic.

PKU is an inherited metabolic disorder that results in severe mental retardation if treatment is not started within the first few weeks of life. If the disorder is detected early, and with a well-maintained appropriate diet, affected children can have normal development and lifespan. While most developed countries have programmes to screen newborns for this disorder, only 30 to 35 per cent of babies worldwide undergo such screening programmes.

Enzolve Technologies, based at NovaUCD – the innovation and technology transfer centre at UCD – has designed and developed its novel diagnostic test over the past two years. The company was co-founded by Prof Paul C Engel and Dr Suren Aghajanian as a spin-out from UCD's School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science.

The PKU test is the first in a suite of products called NeoScreenPak, which Enzolve is developing to screen for a variety of metabolic disorders in babies.

Speaking in advance of the formal product launch, Prof Philip Mayne, director of the National Newborn Screening Laboratory at the Children's University Hospital, Dublin, said: "This is a significant advance for Enzolve and has potential for newborn screening around the world. The product is very suitable for countries that cannot invest in advanced screening equipment, allowing these countries to implement national screening programmes for PKU."

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