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A great deal of research effort and funding injected into studying colo-rectal cancer holds promise of early diagnosis and effective treatment. In 2008 alone, the NIH infused \$274 million into colo-rectal cancer research. A noninvasive test screening test for colo-rectal cancer is a market need and companies are pacing forward with their biomarker attempts. Smack in the middle of this research is Israel-based Micromedic Technologies that is attempting to commercialize a colo-rectal cancer screening test based on a CD24 marker.

Colo-rectal cancer is the third most common cancer targeting men and women, and the current approach to detect the disease is only colon or gastric endoscopy. Not only is the procedure invasive and taxing, which reduces patient compliance, with this method the physician can detect cancer only after it has spread. According to American Cancer Society, the goal is to screen 75% of the average risk population above 50 years by 2015, in comparison to the 50% of the population being screened presently. But the concern among the medical community is how to convince people to undergo the potentially life-saving colonoscopy?

Nadir Arber, a professor of gastroenterology at Tel Aviv's Sackler Institute of Medicine has developed a simple blood-based test to detect colon cancer at an early stage. This appears to be the first test on the market to detect cells of colon polyps (precursor cells to colon cancer) in blood with a high degree of sensitivity and specificity. Bio Mark Ltd., a subsidiary of Micromedic Technologies Ltd., is now preparing to market this test. The invention is based on a qualitative detection of elevated levels of CD24 biomarker in the blood, which may be indicative of gastrointestinal abnormalities such as colon polyps, colon adenomas, and colorectal carcinoma.

"If we can identify those who are prone to cancer through a less invasive test, we can convince them to do the colonoscopy, leading to earlier detection and treatment," says Arber.

Talking to *Technical Insights* about this simple-warning test, the CEO of Micromedic Technologies, David Solomon says, "We see CD24 as a promising new biomarker based on our studies. The marker is effective in being able to identify adenomas and colo-rectal cancer at a very early stage, in addition to demonstrating a sensitivity and specificity above 80%. We believe that improvement of the assay and better inclusion/exclusion criteria will improve the assay performance and we are working towards it."

Another reason for low patient compliance with colonoscopy is the high cost associated with it. Arber's protein-based early detection test is expected to cost much lesser than the DNA or RNA based tests at \$50 to \$100 per test.

To protect this innovation, the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center has filed a world patent (WO/2007/088537 Title: Methods and Kits for Early Detection of Cancer or Predisposition Thereto).

Details: David Solomon, CEO, Micromedic Technologies Ltd., HaYezira 3 Ramat Gan, 52521, Israel. Phone: +972-3-5756917. Fax: +972-3-5756919. E-mail: David@dsc.co.il. URL: www.m-medic.com.

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For general assistance and enquiries:

Asia Pacific:
+65 68900999
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Europe & Africa:
+44 (0)20 7343 8383
enquiries@frost.com

Latin America:
+54 11 4777 1550
myfrost.la@frost.com

Middle East & North Africa:
+971.4.4331.893
meenquiries@frost.com

North America:
+1.877.463.7678
myfrost@frost.com

South Asia:
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