

JumpStart invests in Geauga company

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JumpStart Inc. has committed to invest \$350,000 in a Bainbridge Township company that is developing a medical device to help obstetricians prevent preterm births.

Northeast Ohio's venture development organization announced the investment in CerviLenz Inc. at its annual public meeting at Cuyahoga Community College's Corporate College East on Thursday evening.

JumpStart also announced an investment in Stack Media of Cleveland, which is a magazine that publishes training information for high school athletes. JumpStart declined to say how much it invested, but the money will be used to create an online product for Stack Media.

CerviLenz is developing a disposable medical device that measures the length of a pregnant woman's cervix. Recent research has found that this measurement is an effective predictor of preterm-birth risk.

Before this research, which was largely done in Europe, women at high risk for delivering too early have been hard to identify, said Dr. Justin Lavin, a high-risk-obstetrics doctor at Akron Children's Hospital.

Armed with the cervical information, obstetricians can administer progesterone -- a female hormone -- to women who have short cervixes to reduce their risk of giving birth prematurely.

Progesterone therapy has few risks and can reduce a woman's chance of premature birth by about half, said Lavin, director of maternal-fetal medicine at Children's Hospital.

Lavin and his colleagues have been using ultrasound equipment to screen all their pregnant patients for cervical length since the beginning of the year. Once its measurements are correlated with those already taken by ultrasound, the CerviLenz device may prove easier and more convenient to use than ultrasound, Lavin said.

Akron Children's Hospital and University Hospitals in Cleveland probably will help study the device, said Dean Koch, chief executive of CerviLenz.

The CerviLenz device -- a probe that is inserted into the vaginal canal to directly measure the cervix -- was invented by California obstetrician Rosalyn Baxter-Jones and tested, in part, at Harbor/UCLA Medical Center in Torrance, Calif., Koch said.

Dr. Michael Ross, chairman of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the center's David Geffen School of Medicine, and Koch bought a majority interest in the device in 2006, Koch said.

Though the device has been cleared for sale by the Food and Drug Administration and is protected by several U.S. and foreign patents, it has not been commercialized -- until now.

"This is really the step to take it to the marketplace," said Koch, who spent the last 10 years with Adeza Biomedical, a medical-device company in California that was one of the first in the preterm-birth market.

The JumpStart investment also will help CerviLenz complete clinical trials, do more market research and plan its marketing efforts. The CerviLenz financing is JumpStart's 40th investment in 29 companies since mid-2004.