

# CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

## **Clinic atrial fibrillation center's heightened pulse credited to labs, leader**

By CHUCK SODER

New leadership and new laboratories have helped the once-struggling Atrial Fibrillation Innovation Center in Cleveland attract nearly eight times more dollars for industry-sponsored research so far this year than it did during the like period last year.

The center, a partnership that houses most of its operations at the Cleveland Clinic, secured more than \$8 million in industry-sponsored research during the first nine months of 2007. That figure is way up from the year-ago period, when it attracted about \$1 million from companies working on techniques and devices to fight atrial fibrillation, a common heart rhythm problem that can cause strokes.

Executive director Alan Bentley attributed the increase to the emergence of steady leadership at the state-financed center after the hiring of Dr. A. Marc Gillinov as its principal investigator in mid-2006 and to new labs that opened at the Clinic last March.

"There's no doubt that both of those were equally key elements in ramping up our partnerships," Mr. Bentley said.

The center, which was founded in mid-2005 after receiving \$23 million in state money, foundered early on, he said.

Its original principal investigator, Dr. Eric Topol, left the Clinic in February 2006 to teach and do research at Case Western Reserve University. In October 2006, Dr. Topol left Cleveland for Scripps Health of San Diego.

The center gained focus when it hired Dr. Gillinov to fill the vacancy. He helped move deals from discussion to action, Mr. Bentley said.

The center that fall sped up negotiations by making its research agreements friendlier to businesses, Mr. Bentley said. They now preclude the center from patenting any discovery made while doing research for a business unless the finding is unrelated to the company's product.

All the while, the center's leaders also became better at working with companies, Mr. Bentley said.

"We began to work at the speed of business," he said.

Mr. Bentley also credited Dr. Gillinov with increasing the center's efficiency by improving communication among the five departments that comprise it.

The center's new laboratories spurred industry-sponsored research months before they opened because companies expected eventually to use them, Mr. Bentley said.

The two labs are equipped with surgical and imaging equipment used for research on animals.

Already using the labs are medical device companies such as Boston Scientific Corp. of Natick, Mass., Medtronic Inc. of Minneapolis and Hansen Medical Inc. of Mountain View, Calif.

Hansen was the first company to use the lab, where it conducts research and trains physicians on its robotically controlled catheters, said Hansen CEO Frederic Moll.

"It's a great facility," he said. "It's a great group of people. Very knowledgeable and capable."

The center is a partnership between the Clinic and multiple academic institutions and businesses. It has a staff of about 24, three-fourths of which are housed at the Clinic.

In May 2005, the center was awarded a \$15 million Wright Center of Innovation grant from the Ohio Third Frontier Project, a \$1.6 billion program aimed at promoting the state's economy through technology. It got another \$8 million from Ohio's tobacco lawsuit settlement fund.

Mr. Bentley said the center is on track to meet goals set by the state now that it is bringing in more research money. "We started out in the hole, but I think we've come back very strongly," he said.

The Ohio Department of Development asks that its Wright Centers generate a return of three-and-a-half times the amount of their grants in six years and to become self-sustaining, said Marc Cloutier, senior adviser for the department's biotechnology division.