

DNA Laboratory to Come Up in Dubai

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DUBAI - By 2011, Dubai will have in place a fully automated DNA laboratory to screen genetic disorders including thalassemia, a blood disorder that affects a large part of the local population.

The laboratory is being set up at the cost of Dh11 million by the UAE Genetics Diseases Association (UAEGDA) at the **Dubai Biotechnology and Research Park (DuBiotech)**. The association will also establish its new research and facilities at The Nucleotide Lab Complex in DuBiotech Park. "Tests will be prioritised at the lab," said the Executive Director of UAEGDA, Dr Maryam Matar. "There are several genetic disorders in the UAE but we will focus on those that are the most common and manageable disorder such as thalassemia," she added. This genetic disease is a hereditary anaemia affecting over 70 million people around the globe and 1 in 12 Emiratis.

The lab will also focus on pre-testing and awareness. "Before blood samples are taken, we will require people to participate in an awareness and screening programme so that they do not get shocked if they test positive," said Dr Matar. UAEGDA will also offer counselling and referrals, she added.

The lab is being set up in collaboration with Professor Yukio Hattori and his team from Yamaguchi University of Japan, which will serve as a reference DNA Laboratory, providing confirmatory tests of ongoing national projects.

The new UAEGDA facilities will also provide research opportunities for Emirati students through doctorate programmes and training platforms for students of health sciences from Zayed University and Higher Colleges of Technology. The facilities will also be utilised to conduct conferences and workshops in molecular biology in the UAE. "UAEGDA strongly represents the region's science and technology expertise that is poised to dramatically improve human health care in the years to come. For DuBiotech, this is a vital step in developing and expanding services that will eventually support a range of collaborations between genetic service providers and those in related sciences," said Director of DuBiotech Park, Marwan Abdulaziz.

UAEGDA was established with the main aim to control and prevent population-specific genetic disorders prevalent in the UAE. The first project of UAEGDA -- Emirates free of Thalassemia by the year 2012 Project -- is aimed at identifying the carriers of common inherited blood disorders including those with Sickle cell and Beta-Thalassemia. The initiative also aims at creating new job opportunities for Emirati researchers, extending diagnostic service facility on request from the government sector and to be utilised as a platform for molecular biology projects funded by other designated organisations.

(Zawya)