

LabCorp, Duke to work on cancer test

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LabCorp, the Burlington-based medical testing company, agreed to join Duke University scientists in developing a blood test for early lung cancer detection.

Current diagnostic tools -- imaging techniques such as X-ray -- are frequently insufficient for doctors to determine whether an abnormality is likely cancerous or not, said Dr. Edward Patz, the Duke professor of radiology who is overseeing the work.

The test has been studied on about 100 patients, but more data are needed before the test can be used commercially. Without regulatory roadblocks, the test could become available in 2009, according to LabCorp.

Financial details of the partnership were not disclosed.

Patz said the test could be important in diagnosing lung cancer in the earliest stages. Lung cancer has a high mortality rate if not detected early, accounting for the most cancer-related deaths annually in the U.S. The American Cancer Society reported 164,000 deaths from the disease in 2006.

The test that the Duke scientists designed detects the amount and combinations of four proteins in the blood. These biomarkers promise to tell doctors which abnormal chest scan might have a high risk of being cancer.

High-risk patients would undergo a lung biopsy. Low-risk patients wouldn't.

"This technology has the potential to stratify patients that may need more aggressive follow-up treatment and monitoring," said Dr. Myla P. Lai-Goldman, LabCorp's chief scientific officer.

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