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NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR EARLY DETECTION OF DIABETES

A new device based on technology developed by Prof Nai-Teng Yu, Head of the Department of Chemistry at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, is set to help in the early detection of diabetes, a metabolic disorder that affects more than 100 million people worldwide. The non-invasive screening device is expected on the market later this year, manufactured under license by SpectRx Inc., in the US.

The device uses low-level, multicolored light beams aimed at a patient's eye to detect the natural fluorescence of the lens. In diabetic patients, the intensity of the fluorescence is higher because of changes in the lens proteins.

Detection is almost instantaneous and non-invasive, offering a convenient alternative to the current blood test. With no blood or medical waste to dispose of, the device could be used at physicians' clinics, doctors' surgeries and other sites for mass screening.

"This diabetes screening instrument will be particularly important in detecting cases of type II diabetes, many of which can go undiagnosed for up to 10 years," says Prof Yu. Type II diabetes, characterized by gradual onset later in life and treatable through dietary control, often goes undetected because symptoms can be minimal, even though internal damage is occurring.

Moreover, a delay in treatment can lead to serious complications, including blindness, kidney failure, and heart disease.

SpectRx expects sales revenues from the device to top US\$15-25 million (HK\$116-194 million) a year by 1998 or 1999.

Note to Editors:

Enquiries should be directed to the Office of Public Affairs at 2358 6173.