

Duke considers incubator in Kannapolis

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Duke University is looking to launch an ambitious business incubator at the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis, a project that will cost tens of millions of dollars.

The Biomarker Factory, which is still in the planning stage, would encompass a nonprofit institute, a for-profit contract research organization and work with commercial partners, Robert Califf said Thursday. He is a principal investigator on Duke's long-term health study based at the \$1.5 billion campus founded by billionaire Dole Food owner David Murdock.

The project will bring in scientists over a range of disciplines with the goal of developing research with practical health care applications to the market, Califf said. Molecular, clinical, genomic, epidemiological and other scientists would be involved, he said.

Califf compared the work to making a car. Rather than having the engine built at one site and the seats at another, all the components would be under one roof.

Biomarkers measure a biological process and are used to help understand diseases. For instance, any lab test, such as a cholesterol screen, involves biomarkers. The key is looking for patterns among multiple markers.

Califf cautioned that there was no timetable for the project yet.

Murdock launched the health study named after him with a \$35 million donation, which should cover the first five years of operations. The health study is focusing on obesity, cardiovascular disease, hepatitis C and osteoarthritis.

But sustaining the work over many more years requires a lot more money, and Califf said the nonprofit group at the factory will help Duke raise funds for the study.

Murdock's plans call for Duke to occupy its own building near the center of the campus. Califf estimated it will cost "tens of millions of dollars" for Duke's building and scientists at the campus. One group Duke is talking to is Laboratory Corp. of America, Califf said.

The campus recently opened its first three buildings. Murdock is collaborating with private companies and eight N.C. universities, including Duke, UNC Chapel Hill, N.C. State University and UNC Charlotte.

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