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FSU professor wins innovation prize for preterm labor invention

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A Florida State University professor who invented a sleep mask that will help pregnant women stave off preterm labor has won the \$50,000 Cade Museum Prize for innovation.

The mask's creator is Associate Professor of Biomedical Sciences James Olcese, who founded a company named KynderMed to promote and market this new technology.

"There's not been any developments in preterm labor for 40 years," Olcese said. "This is really drawing attention to a totally new way of thinking about the whole problem."

Several years ago, Olcese recognized that many women go into labor at night when the hormone melatonin is at its peak. Additional research conducted with late-term pregnant volunteers at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital found that when women were exposed to bright light for an hour during the night, their melatonin levels dropped, suppressing contractions and ultimately delaying labor.

So Olcese began pondering how to best get this technology to pregnant women who might be at risk for preterm labor. About 11 percent of pregnant women go into preterm labor, which means birth that occurs between 20 weeks and 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Working with FSU's **Office of Commercialization**, he met with medical professionals and business executives about how to translate the work he had done in the lab into a product to help people.

Olcese originally considered the idea of goggles that flashed light while the pregnant woman slept, but they were too bulky and awkward. He ultimately settled on a sleep mask, much like the ones people wear on airplanes.

The mask pulses blue light while the women sleep.

He's now conducting additional studies on comfort, use and general feasibility of that mask, while KynderMed CEO Don Rosenkoetter, a business executive with expertise in women's health, continues



to market the technology. The product will likely be on the market in about a year.

Phoebe Miles, CEO and Board President of the Cade Museum; FSU researcher James Olcese; KynderMed CEO Don Rosenkoetter; and Richard Miles, Board VP of the Cade Museum.

“Things fell together little by little,” Olcese said. “It became clear our initial work on the melatonin receptors in the uterus had some biological significance, not just an oddity. As the puzzle began to take shape, I saw that there could be something interesting.”

The Cade Museum for Creativity + Invention created the prize in honor of Dr. James Robert Cade, a physician and University of Florida researcher who is mostly known for leading the team that created the sports drink Gatorade. The prize is designed to help early-stage companies move their ideas or products to market.

Cade and his family established the Cade Museum Foundation in 2004 to design and build a museum in Gainesville. They have been awarding the Cade Museum Prize through a grant from the Community Foundation of North Central Florida since 2010. The museum is scheduled to open summer 2017.

Olcese said he is hopeful the prize will draw more attention to KynderMed from the medical community and potential investors and thus enable the company to get it more quickly to people in need.

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