

Securing IP strategy upfront to streamline public health innovation deployment

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is taking aim at the world's most urgent public health issues, and one important strategy is to fund and mobilize university-based healthcare innovations. The Gates Foundation is partnering with numerous academic and research institutions, including the University of Washington, to promote the development and accessibility of innovative technologies that address the health issues of people in the developing world. The goal is not to "throw money at the problem," but to award grants thoughtfully and selectively to projects with well developed strategies regarding the ownership and management of intellectual property (IP) protection that are tailored to the type of product being developed. Such forward-looking IP strategies are aimed at ensuring that the resulting innovations will be made available for the benefit of people living within developing countries, serving the Foundation's goal of global access.

The Gates awards, with their proactive IP strategies, have created a new role for UW TechTransfer. Aline Flower, Manager of Legal Affairs, and Ariadna Santander, Manager of the Agreements Group, are scrutinizing incoming material transfer and license agreements that relate to the work of UW researchers Philip Greenberg and Joseph Blattman. Drs. Greenberg and Blattman play a key role in the Gates-funded global Consortium on AIDS Vaccine Discovery (CAVD). Flower and Santander are monitoring agreements with Greenberg's Mouse Immunology Lab for any potential problems with the research project's associated IP that could prevent the deployment of the much hoped-for HIV vaccine.

UW TechTransfer's substantial involvement in this global effort is a different kind of task for the office. As a service mission, it supports the ultimate goal of UW TechTransfer, which is to extend the impact of UW research. "This isn't about making money, it's about making healthcare advances available to people living within developing countries," said Flower. "We want no IP obstacles to stand in the way of applying UW innovations to urgent world health concerns."

For some agreements, IP issues can be difficult to untangle. For example, many research materials such as transgenic mice, cell lines, and cultures come to the UW from other institutions with their own IP rights attached. Agreements Manager Santander said, "My team ensures that incoming agreements are carefully reviewed and negotiated to avoid intellectual property language that would be in conflict with our global access mandate under the Gates Foundation funding. The Foundation understands that technology transfer offices are familiar with IP issues surrounding large-scale research projects, and that in order to achieve global access initiatives there needs to be oversight of potential IP conflicts. Our role is to provide this oversight so the overall goal of the program can be achieved."

As part of the UW's and the Gates Foundation efforts to address world health needs, the UW established the Department of Global Health. A \$20 million grant from the Foundation will help fund the interdisciplinary program, which will serve as a focal point for the University's efforts to identify health problems in underserved populations and develop and implement innovative solutions.

