Students' medical device wins UCSB's annual New Venture contest

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A new medical device that can save time and lives in critical emergency situations won four UCSB students $10,000 at the seventh annual New Venture Competition held on the Isla Vista campus Friday.

The device is a laryngoscope — used to place a ventilation tube in the windpipe of an unconscious patient — with a built-in suction system. It was developed by a team calling its proposed company Emergency Medical Technologies.

Currently, a separate suction device has to be used in medical emergencies to clear blood or other fluids that might be obstructing the throat and airway.

Team members Eran Levy, Adam Brener and Nathan Lovell pitched their company to a panel of judges during a two-hour competition in a packed Corwin Pavilion. A fourth team member, Scott Perry, was in Ohio competing in another event — the Ultimate Frisbee finals.

In his presentation, Mr. Levy said combining compressed-air suction with the laryngoscope made the device cheaper and easier to handle by emergency personnel. Those two efficiencies mean saving more lives as well as making money in a market with annual sales worth $500 million.

The four winners share the prize money, though Mr. Brener expected most of it would be plowed back into the company. "It's the start of the capital we may need," he said.

The next step for these entrepreneurs is a place in the second annual Draper Fisher Jurvetson Venture Challenge. Held in San Jose next Tuesday, this national event offers a $250,000 capital investment, or more, to the winning team once it becomes an incorporated company.

Emergency Medical Technologies defeated four other finalists for top honors, though there were $4,000 consolation prizes for two of those other teams.

Nathan Bouxsein, Jerry Macala, Chris McAllister and Ralf Simon won the award for best pitch with their company, Calipgen, which offers new means of delivering biotechnology therapies inside cells to fight disease more effectively.

The award for best written plan went to Kevin Boulware, Marco Meza and Salal Hall of Aware Biotechnologies, which is commercializing biomarkers for the early detection of breast, ovarian and pancreatic cancers.

The other two plans that made it through to the finals from a lineup of nine semifinal teams were VertiTint Solutions (Dhideep Raje and Gayatri Swamymanthan), with a smart-window technology to reduce energy consumption in commercial buildings, and Tamarisc Diagnostics (Bo Skjellerup, Alon Raphael, August Estabrook and Gary Braun), whose device would enable fast and cost-efficient identification of threatening viral, cancerous, bacterial and biological agents.

On an evening of awards, UCSB's Technology Management Program gave the "Venky" to Klaus Schauer, one of the founders of Santa Barbara software company ExpertCity, now known as Citrix Online.

The winning team in Friday's annual New Venture Competition at UCSB was, from left, Adam Brener, Nathan Lovell and Eran Levy. Their company, Emergency Medical Technologies, picked up the $10,000 first prize, which they will share with absent team member Scott Perry. Their idea: a laryngoscope with built-in suction.

The award is named after professor Venkatesh Narayanamurti, dean of the College of Engineering at UCSB from 1992 until 1998, when he left to become a professor at Harvard.

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