£200,000 Donation Boosts TB Research at Birmingham

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Researchers at the University of Birmingham, searching for new tuberculosis treatments have received a significant boost thanks to a donation from a University alumnus. James Bardrick a Mechanical Engineering and Economics graduate from Birmingham has pledged £200,000 to support research investigating new drug targets for the treatment of the disease.

Tuberculosis is still rife in the developing world, with more than 14.6 million cases occurring each year. The bacterium is responsible for more than 1.7 million deaths worldwide, with the majority occurring in South America, Southern Africa and South East-Asia.

James explains: "Tuberculosis remains a global disease, which causes nearly two million deaths each year. As current treatments are expensive and ineffective against drug resistant strains of the bacterium, it is particularly important to provide support for research that has the potential to have a significant impact on the way the disease is treated. Because the majority of TB cases occur in the developing world, the work done by researchers like those in Birmingham to find more cost effective treatments is hugely important."

Professor Gurdyal Besra's group are investigating new ways of delivering drugs to the tuberculosis bacterium. Their research focuses on finding ways to pierce the tough fatty acid layer that surrounds the cell, which makes drug delivery extremely difficult.

Professor Besra explains: "We are truly delighted to receive this generous donation as it will allow us to develop our search for new drug targets on the wall of the TB bacteria.

The lipid coating that surrounds the bacteria is exceptionally tough and resistant to drug therapy. This means that currently patients often need to take up to six different drugs over a period of nine months to completely eradicate the disease. This is extremely expensive and also means that many patients don't complete their course of treatment, as symptoms seem to disappear quite rapidly. Because the current drugs struggle to penetrate the impervious coating of the bacteria, we have focused our efforts on finding new targets for drugs, to overcome this problem."

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