# Harvard Licensing Deal Reflects Its 'Public Mission'

**The Chronicle of Higher Education, October 19, 2007** - Harvard University, one of the originators of a statement of how institutions can serve the public good while commercializing technology, has taken the message to heart.

A deal that the university has just signed for licensing a new vaccine technology, a top official says, reflects many of the principles espoused in the statement.

The invention involves a biochemical method of producing vaccines that could prove to be less complex than many existing approaches.

The technique, which still must be tested in human beings, could solve a problem that makes existing vaccines expensive to produce, says John Mekalanos, chair of the department of microbiology and molecular genetics at Harvard Medical School, and inventor of the technique.

Mr. Mekalanos has spent his career working on vaccines for diseases that afflict people in the developing world.

Under the terms of the licensing agreement, a Chinese investment firm called the Morningside Group will form a company to develop and commercialize the vaccine technology. Morningside agreed to sell vaccines produced with the method at affordable prices in poor and developing countries, and Harvard agreed to relinquish all of its royalties on sales in those countries.

Harvard has also reserved "humanitarian rights" to bypass Morningside and directly license the vaccine technology to government bodies or nongovernmental organizations to distribute vaccines made with the technology.

Harvard has long considered its "public mission" when licensing, says Isaac T. Kohlberg, senior associate provost and chief technology-development officer.

But he says this licensing deal is one of the first to put the public-interest guidelines to work in a "comprehensive" way.

The statement on licensing principles, "In the Public Interest: Nine Points to Consider in Licensing University Technology," urges universities to carve out protections in such deals so that poor people and those in developing nations are not denied affordable access to life-saving cures because patent rights have been sold to companies.

The new technology could also be applicable to vaccines for diseases that are more common in developed countries, where people can afford to pay unsubsidized prices, but Mr. Mekalanos says most of the technology's target diseases, including some virulent strains of meningitis, are found primarily in the developing world.

Mr. Kohlberg, says Morningside was willing to invest despite knowing that the main market for the drug did not include the world's richest countries, and despite knowing that it could be at least six years before any vaccines are available.

"There won't be a quick exit for them," he says. But Harvard was pleased to have found a company willing to make this deal, he adds. American venture capitalists, he says, "were not interested in this."