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03 April 2008 (GMT)

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Innovators make breakthrough for women

A piece of software developed in Manchester that can detect osteoporosis by automatically reading routine dental X-rays has secured a deal that could see it help millions of women world-wide.

The technology, Osteodent, which is being commercialised by UMIP (The University of Manchester's IP commercialisation company), has secured a deal with Swedish company Crebone AB for the rights to sell the software until 2010.

The software is designed to increase the detection rates of osteoporosis, which can be treated effectively if identified early. Currently, most women with osteoporosis don't realise they have the condition until late in the disease when they suffer a bone fracture of the spine, hip or wrist. In the UK alone, there are an estimated 3.5million suitable dental X-ray examinations carried out each year.

The University of Manchester received a 1.4m EU grant in 2003 to conduct a study of 670 women's X-rays in the UK, Sweden, Belgium and Greece. The results of the study, which have recently been published, show that Osteodent is the most accurate method for identifying individuals with osteoporosis using dental X-rays and clinical markers.

Since the results of the European study were announced there has been a high level of interest in the product. German dental company, KaVo, is currently undertaking an audit project using Osteodent software which is aimed at improving dentists diagnostic abilities.

Osteodent has been developed by The University of Manchester Dr Hugh Devlin, Dr Jim Graham, Dr Danny Allen and Professor Keith Horner. The initial idea was conceived 18 years ago. UMIP now has two patents on the software, one for North America and one for the rest of the world. Osteodent won the BioNow Healthcare Project of the Year 2007, sponsored by TrusTech.

Professor of Oral and Maxillofacial Imaging, Keith Horner said: Currently it tends to be only the worried well or those with well-informed GPs whose osteoporosis risk is properly assessed. Osteodent will open up the opportunity of being tested to millions of women who attend a dentist and would otherwise not be tested.

We're very excited about this product because we know it has enormous potential. As Osteodent works as part of a routine dental appointment it could have substantial benefits for our NHS financially. In countries with private healthcare systems, Osteodent could also be very lucrative to dentists.

Professor Stuart C. White, Chair of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology at UCLA School of Dentistry in the USA commented: Osteoporosis affects millions of aging men and women worldwide. Since a large fraction of adults seek dental care annually, Osteodent offers the opportunity to screen many individuals for early signs of osteoporosis. This is a truly exciting development.

For more information contact Dr Stephen France at UMIP on 0161 606 7249.