

SURREY

Health-tech hub poised to step onto world stage

TECHNOLOGY | Co-chairman Ryan D’Arcy reflects on Innovation Boulevard as it marks half decade

BY PATRICK BLENNERHASSETT
NEWS@BIV.COM

In describing Innovation Boulevard, Surrey’s multi-million-dollar, multi-building, multi-pronged health-care technology hub, neuroscientist **Ryan D’Arcy** dives into a subset of scientific research. Almost five years into the ambitious project, he likens it to an organic entity now growing on its own.

“It’s an ecosystem, so you don’t manage an ecosystem,” he said. “Sometimes people try really hard to think about how you would manage an ecosystem. Essentially you don’t.”

D’Arcy wears a number of hats within Surrey’s medical community. He’s the co-founder and senior scientist for **Health Tech Connex Inc.**, serves as **Simon Fraser University’s** (SFU) and the **Fraser Health Authority’s** B.C. leadership chair in health-care innovation and is a professor of neuroscience at SFU. He’s also the head of health sciences and innovation at Fraser Health’s **Surrey Memorial Hospital**.

Widely recognized as the driving force and founder of Innovation Boulevard, D’Arcy is attuned to high-level thinking when it comes to something as ambitious as establishing a health tech hub within an already rapidly growing city. He said the hub is largely self-sustaining but requires some micro-management.

“What you can do is you can succeed in specific projects,” D’Arcy said. “And so at the fundamental level we focus on projects and those projects can involve any number of businesses or the university or the hospital.”

D’Arcy acknowledged that one of the original intentions when Innovation Boulevard was launched in 2012 was to establish a medical school through SFU. But its goals are different now. They’re aimed at filling a much needed role at the crossroads of health care and entrepreneurship.

“What we really needed to do was fill a desperate gap in B.C.’s landscape, health technology and innovation,” he said. “And basically weave that into the existing strengths that are already in B.C.



Ryan D’Arcy likens Innovation Boulevard to a health technology ecosystem | ROB KRUYT

Going and reinventing the wheel is not necessarily going to give us better health care at Surrey Memorial or drive new growth within the province. So I think the key component is to look at where we can add value.”

D’Arcy said Innovation Boulevard leadership has drawn from several sources for its conception of the health-care hub, most notably Silicon Valley, but did not intend to duplicate any particular tech community.

“They didn’t start out to make Silicon Valley. They did start out and look around and say, ‘Wow, there are some major successful companies here.’ The Apples, the Facebooks, the Googles of the world – then it got the name Silicon Valley. In Surrey it was an incredibly different set of circumstances; there was never supposed to be a tech sector growing out of Surrey. So we had

to create Innovation Boulevard to say, ‘This is the vision.’”

According to its website, Innovation Boulevard has generated \$145 million in new infrastructure investment, 16,900 square feet of embedded lab space and 22 jobs.

Ten companies have moved in and three new products have been taken to commercialization. HealthTech Connex is also set to launch the Centre for Neurology Studies within the space, which will be a research centre geared toward brain health. **Helius Medical Technologies**, which has developed a medical device called PoNS, for treatment of neurological disease or trauma, has already signed on to do clinical trials in Surrey. A number of other projects are coming down the pipe, including research in dementia and Parkinson’s Disease.

SFU, the **City of Surrey** and France’s **Société d’accélération du transfert de technologies** recently signed a memorandum of understanding to formalize their relationship, linking up with national initiatives including the **Age-Well** Networks of Centres of Excellence and **NeuroDevNet**, which studies children’s brain development.

D’Arcy added that one of the keys to Innovation Boulevard is its full embrace of the business world and commercializing medical technology.

He said the business aspect brings a “litmus test” to any project.

“If you’re going to do something you have to have a value proposition. And when we’re engaged in technologies to improve health care, the business component ensures the value proposition.”

Innovation Boulevard also

Sometimes people try really hard to think about how you would manage an ecosystem. Essentially you don’t. But what you can do is you can succeed in specific projects, and so at the fundamental level we focus on projects and those projects can involve any number of businesses or the university or the hospital

RYAN D’ARCY
FOUNDER, INNOVATION BOULEVARD

recently held an event called The Front and Back-End of Innovation: Competing on the International Stage, which looks to launch the hub into the highly competitive global medical technology market. D’Arcy, who initially focused on managing the startup phase, has now moved back to his main area of research in neuroscience. He said Innovation Boulevard is up and running – and now the real work begins.

“My last year has been focused on delivering the goods,” he said.

Looking back on those initial conversations and meetings, he said one thing has remained constant: the underlying mission statement.

“It was really around how we could use innovation and technology to touch people’s lives. So that’s probably, within a sentence, the spirit of what guides the activities.” ■



We are everywhere – Surrey and beyond

Our practice takes us wherever our clients need us; from the courtroom, to the boardroom, to offices and factories, from Vancouver to the Fraser Valley and further afield. You’ll also find us at mcquarrie.com.

McQuarrie
HUNTER LLP
BARRISTERS & SOLICITORS

MCQUARRIE.COM