

UMS man confident of antibiotics breakthrough

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KOTA KINABALU: A Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) researcher who had the opportunity to be part of an Antarctica research expedition last year is positive that they will be able to produce new antibiotics that could be used against cholera and the food poisoning bacterial agent salmonella.

Dr Michael Wong of the Biotechnology and Research Institute who is from Sembulan, said so far they have managed to identify 10 species from samples taken from Antarctica.

"Of course we have to double confirm and do more clinical tests and biological tests.

"But we are very positive that something interesting will come up (from the samples)," he said after the launching of the ISCU-SCAR Forum on Understanding the Implication of Rapid Warming in the Polar Regions on Earth Systems by Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

Pairin was representing Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman.

Dr Wong said the samples would continue to be analysed and subsequently confirmed before they produce the test results.

From the test results, he said they hope that the items could be further developed into pharmaceutical products to combat or kill multiple resistant bacteria that are found in Malaysia such as salmonella and cholera.

Relating his experience at Antarctic, he said when the weather turns bad it is usually accompanied by strong winds and blizzards and lasts up to a week.

But during his tenure at the ice-covered region, most of the time it was good weather.

"However, even during bad weather, we still have to go out (and do our work) otherwise our time spent there will be wasted," he said.

Normally, Dr Wong said during severe weather conditions, they don't venture too far out from the station.

He and another colleague, Associate Prof Dr Baba Musta of the School of Science and Technology, were sent by UMS through the Malaysian Antarctic Research Programme (MARP) programme under the Academy Science of Malaysia from Dec 2004 to Mar 2005.

They were with a group of Indian scientists for a period of four months where the duo was assigned to carry out research project on bacteria and geology.

These research concentrated in the surrounding area of Maitri station, which is the Indian station on Antarctica, in Schimarcher Oasis, East Antarctica.

Dr Wong, a former student of SM La Salle, received his PhD from Cambridge University.

"I wrote a proposal to the government on Antarctic and eventually got the opportunity to go there in 2004," he said.

He went there again from January to February this year to conduct further research on bacteria.



Dr Michael