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Optics confab to look at bioscience

By **David Wichner**
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

A Tucson conference in April will feature a day of presentations on biosciences-related topics, such as drug discovery, clinical



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diagnostics and medical imaging.

But it isn't a biosciences conference - it's Photon Forum 2004, an optics conference to be held April 5-7 at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort.

By coincidence, Arizona's statewide biotechnology convention, the 2004 Southwest BioPartnering Conference & Expo, is happening in Tucson the same week.

However, it's more than happenstance that the Tucson optics conference is filled with bioscience programs.

Michael Stevenson, contributing editor of Optics Report and an organizer of the first annual Photon Forum, said the program reflects the ever-present and growing nexus between optics and biosciences.

When Stevenson and other organizers sat down to lay out the forum's program, they looked for the hottest topics going - and arrived at bio-optics and defense or security-related technology.

The Photon Forum is co-produced by Tucson-based Breault Research Organization Inc., which publishes Optics Report, and PennWell Corp., a

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While the first full day of the conference - April 6 - will feature bio-optics, the second day will be devoted to optics applications for defense and security.

The Photon Forum schedule had been set before the BioIndustry Organization of Southern Arizona published the dates for the BioPartnering Conference, Stevenson said.

While the role of optics is obvious in areas such as medical imaging and ophthalmology, optics has played a key role in the evolution of biotechnology, from the mapping of the human genome to current efforts to identify genes as clues to disease susceptibility and therapies.

"Without optics, the genome project never would have been completed," Stevenson said, noting lasers, fluorescence and other optical technologies are used in devices that sequence, replicate and analyze DNA.

Topics to be covered in the Photon Forum's bio-optics program will include:

- ° Drug discovery - The use of optics to improve molecular-level chemistry screening and analysis of gene activity.
- ° Clinical diagnostics - New optical imaging methods for analysis of DNA and other biological molecules, to perform fast, cost-effective tests in doctors' offices; and the use of spectroscopy and lasers in bioscience, analytical chemistry and other applications.
- ° Vision technology - Ophthalmological advances including optical

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sensing for corrective surgery, lens implants and treatment of vision loss.

- Glucose monitoring - New uses for optics as a way to measure blood-sugar levels in diabetics.
- Surgical displays - "Wearable" medical displays that allow surgeons to view medical information or create "virtual" operating rooms.
- Telemedicine - Medical equipment, data handling and displays that allow doctors to consult long-distance, via phone, computer or video links.
- Medical imaging - New methods to identify disease-related abnormalities before physical changes become apparent.

Such uses of new, optics-based technologies in biomedical areas will only increase in the coming years, said Jim Schwiegerling, a University of Arizona assistant professor of optical sciences and ophthalmology who is making the vision-technology presentation.

"I think the big developments over the next 25 years will come mainly in bio-related stuff, partly because of the demand from people to have a high quality of life as the live longer," said Schwiegerling, who recently co-developed a new, low-cost camera to create images of the retina, or inside back of the eye.

While many local bio-industry officials will be busy at the BioPartnering conference during the Photon Forum, transcripts and other information will be available after the event, Optics Report's Stevenson said.

For a complete program schedule, registration or other information on the Photon Forum, call Optics Report at 547-1945 or go to the publication's

Web site at www.opticsreport.com

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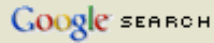
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