

Nanotechnology offers food for thought

By **BRYAN LEE**
and **ERICA TAY**

CHINESE company Equation NanoTech is raising eyebrows at Global Entrepolis @ Singapore. It is offering a range of credit card-sized plastic cards which, it says, can enhance breast health, ease menstrual pain and even "promote male vitality".

Doctors, however, were sceptical, saying that while they do not reject the cards outright, they want to see evidence before being convinced.

The cards, launched on Tuesday, come in 11 varieties with different purport-

Good for health ...or too good to be true?

ed functions, including absorbing odours from the fridge, reducing hypertension and relieving pain.

It even has a card which, according to the brochure, "drastically reduces the harmful effects" of alcohol and cigarettes.

Priced from \$68 to \$98, the cards are said to be good for five years.

Equation chairman Jiang Dezhen says: "These products are based on the latest nanotechnology and were developed by our research team in Beijing over eight years."

Nanotechnology is an area of science which deals with developing and producing extremely small tools and machines by

controlling the arrangement of individual atoms.

The firm claims the pain-relief card works by using nanotechnology to "transform heat energy from the body into photon energy". This penetrates the skin to improve "micro-circulation".

For cards that address breast health, body odour and other ailments, the idea is to place the cards at or near the affected parts of the body.

The firm recently set up a plant in Singapore and hopes to sell the cards at retail outlets, hospitals and pharmacies soon.

Sales and marketing manager Fradric Teo said: "We do not claim to cure male impotence or prevent breast cancer. These claims are too strong to make. We are just promoting well-being after long-term use."

He said the firm has submitted reports on the products to the Health Sciences Authority and is awaiting approval.

Doctors, however, were hesitant about these quick-fix remedies. Dr Loh Foo Hoo, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Mount Eliza-



TAN SUAN ANN
Equation NanoTech's cards come in 11 varieties with different purported functions.

beth Hospital, said he is sceptical about their ability to relieve menstrual pain and promote healthy breasts.

"I don't dismiss it altogether but I need to know the specifics, what it does to the body. There needs to be evidence, credible proof from proper clinical trials before I can recommend this to my patients."

Dr Christopher Cheng, senior consultant urologist at Gleneagles Hospital, said the cards are unlikely to be a panacea for

men with erectile dysfunction problems. He said the technology is still at its infancy and has not been tried and tested.

Still, the product has at least one convert. Account relationship manager Katherine Tng, 38, bought the pain-relief PowerCard out of curiosity at the Enterprise Exchange kiosk two days ago and said it reduced her headache and shoulder pain significantly.

Cientifica's big plans in S'pore

By **GRACE NG**

CIENTIFICA, a London-based nanotechnology information and consultancy company, plans to open its Asia-Pacific regional headquarters in Singapore in January to tap the sharp increase in demand for the kind of expertise and services it provides, especially from China.

It expects sales from its new Singapore office to exceed US\$2 million (\$83.39 million) in its first year of operations.

Its chief executive and founder, Mr Tim Harper, said yesterday that "Singapore is an obvious location for Cientifica" because of its strengths in multiple areas from electronics to biotechnology, as well as its strategic position as a gateway to Asia.

"In real terms, China is outpacing the rest of the world, and we wanted to position ourselves in

the Asia-Pacific, using Singapore as a base to ride this growth wave," he added.

China is expected to spend more than US\$240 million in nanotechnology research and development between 2003 and 2007, according to a study by the British government's Health and Safety Commission released in March.

Founded in 1997, Cientifica has three offices — in London, Madrid and Oslo — with about 15 staff.

A Cientifica team is at the Global Entrepolis @ Singapore, where it jointly organised a global congress on nanotechnology.

Mr Harper said it had signed on another two clients over the last two days. "We expect group turnover to increase by 70 to 80 per cent next year, and the Singapore operations will contribute to this growth," he said.

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