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September 22, 2016

UH Startup Earns Commercialization Grant for New Technology Fannin-backed company GuidaBot Is Developing a Robotic System for MRI-Guided Interventions

HOUSTON, September 22, 2016 – GuidaBot, LLC, a joint venture between the University of Houston and Fannin Innovation Studio, has received a one-year, \$225,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to develop and commercialize a robotic manipulator designed to work within the powerful magnetic field of an MRI machine.

The small business technology transfer grant will be used to support ongoing research and testing of prototype systems based on GuidaBot’s force transmission mechanism and proprietary software. The GuidaBot technology will enable doctors to perform biopsies while the patient remains within the MRI machine, allowing for faster and more precise procedures.

“The grant will help us maintain momentum in the lab to commercialize the device for medical use,” said GuidaBot Director of Research and Development Michael J. Heffernan, PhD, PE. “Moreover, continued support from the National Science Foundation further validates our work and positions us to actively and effectively pursue strategic partners and investors.”

Financial support for the initial work was provided through a National Science Foundation grant, the University of Houston and Fannin Innovation Studio, which works with institutions in the Texas Medical Center to create and support life sciences businesses.

“The National Science Foundation supports small businesses with the most innovative, cutting-edge ideas that have the potential to become great commercial successes and make huge societal impacts,” said Barry Johnson, PhD, Director of the NSF’s Division of Industrial Innovation and Partnerships. “We hope that this seed funding will spark solutions to some of the most important challenges of our time across all areas of science and technology.”

The company’s technology was developed with a \$1.5 million National Science Foundation Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS) award entitled ‘Multimodal image-guided robot-assisted surgeries’.

“This award has resulted in a suite of robotic, magnetic resonance imaging and computational methods seamlessly integrating the robot, the MRI scanner, and the physician to streamline MRI-guided procedures and improve patient outcomes,” said Dr. Nikolaos V. Tsekos, PhD, an MRI and robotics expert at the University of Houston, director of the Medical Robotics Laboratory, and principle investigator of the original NSF award. “While similar robotic systems use complex piezoelectric, pneumatic or hydraulic motors, we’re developing ours using solid-media transmission, a fundamentally new way of transmitting force.”

Pilot studies have demonstrated the compatibility of the novel force transmission system with the MRI scanner, and the new grant will support further development of the prototype robot and proof-of-concept studies with MRI phantoms.

“The National Science Foundation grant is instrumental in continuing valuable research and development of the robotic manipulator,” said Fannin executive chairman Leo Linbeck III. “This is one of many validations of Fannin’s ability to commercialize technologies and its commitment to Houston’s life sciences infrastructure.”

Ramanan Krishnamoorti, PhD, interim vice president for research and technology transfer at UH, said the partnership with Fannin Innovation Studio has been pivotal. “Bringing innovative technology like that developed by Dr. Tsekos and GuidaBot to the marketplace requires a strong support network of services,” he said. “Combining the intellectual and technical strengths of our faculty with those of our partners in the community can boost the benefits to society.”

About Fannin Innovation Studio

Houston-based Fannin Innovation Studio is an early-stage life sciences development group focused exclusively on commercializing medical technologies. Fannin partners with life science innovators to co-found startup companies by providing a pooled management team, central office space and seed funding. To further bridge the commercialization gap, Fannin’s internship and fellowship programs provide aspiring entrepreneurs with hands-on development experience with its portfolio companies. For more information, visit www.FanninInnovation.com or email innovate@fannininnovation.com.

About the University of Houston

The University of Houston is a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university recognized by The Princeton Review as one of the nation's best colleges for undergraduate education. UH serves the globally competitive Houston and Gulf Coast Region by providing world-class faculty, experiential learning and strategic industry partnerships. Located in the nation's fourth-largest city, UH serves more than 42,700 students in the most ethnically and culturally diverse region in the country.

About the National Science Foundation's Small Business Programs: The National Science Foundation (NSF) awards nearly \$190 million annually to startups and small businesses through the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)/Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) program, transforming scientific discovery into products and services with commercial and societal potential. The non-dilutive grants support research and development (R&D) across all areas of science and technology helping companies de-risk technology for commercial success. The NSF is an independent federal agency with a budget of about \$7 billion that supports fundamental research and education across all fields of science and engineering.

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