

New biotech facility boosts S'pore's role in Covid-19 fight

GenScript's \$20m plant will synthesise genes used in R&D of vaccines and drugs

Timothy Goh
Health Correspondent

Global biotechnology company GenScript Biotech launched a 30,000 sq ft manufacturing facility in Kallang yesterday, boosting Singapore's role in the global fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

The plant, which cost US\$15 million (S\$20.1 million) to set up, will make recombinant proteins and synthesise genes. These are used in the research and development of new vaccines, drugs and therapeutics.

Speaking to reporters after the virtual opening ceremony, Mr Johnson Wang, GenScript's president of Asia-Pacific, said that about 50 staff are employed at the facility, which is expected to create about 100 more roles.

Dr Ray Chen, president of GenScript's life science group, noted that this is the company's first such facility outside of China and the United States.

"Shipping across borders takes time... we are trying to support local scientists and labs. This (facility) will eventually shorten the turn-



around time for shipping and logistics by at least three days," he said.

Dr Chen said that when new Covid-19 variants emerge, scientists need to get their genes and proteins so they can design better therapeutics, antibodies and vaccines.

"If we could deliver that to Duke-NUS (Medical School) quicker from the Singapore facility... that will help them tremendously," he said.

GenScript previously worked with the Agency for Science, Technology and Research's Diagnostics Development Hub (DxD Hub) to co-develop a kit that detects whether someone has antibodies that neutralise the coronavirus.

The kit was invented by Professor Wang Linfa from Duke-NUS Medical School's emerging infectious diseases programme.

Some of the genes and proteins

from GenScript's new facility will be sent to Prof Wang's lab to allow scientists there to further develop their research on neutralising antibodies against the Omicron variant.

Dr Li Yanfeng, site director of GenScript Asia-Pacific's production operation department, said: "With the facility in Singapore, we can quickly... provide the

[QUICK RESPONSE continued on B2](#)

A worker in a laboratory in GenScript Biotech's \$20.1 million manufacturing facility in Singapore. PHOTO: GENSCRIPT BIOTECH CORPORATION

Facility will aid quick response to emerging infections

FROM B1

proteins of the Omicron variant to... help us identify whether the neutralising antibodies induced by vaccination will be able to pro-

tect us against Omicron.”

She added: “The presence of this protein and gene synthesis capacity in Singapore provides us that gateway to quickly respond to not only Covid-19, but also any emerg-

ing future infections.”

Minister of State for Trade and Industry, and Culture, Community and Youth Alvin Tan, who was at the opening ceremony, said GenScript’s decision to set up here

shows Singapore’s strong capabilities in the biomedical sciences sector.

The “continued drive and ambition to attract best-in-class investments” can create new opportuni-

ties for Singaporeans, he said.

Last year, German biotechnology company BioNTech announced plans to set up a regional headquarters and manufacturing facility here.

Pharmaceutical giant Sanofi Pasteur also said last year that it is investing €400 million (\$614 million) over five years to build a

vaccine production centre in Singapore.

Yesterday, GenScript and DxDNA Hub signed a memorandum of understanding to – among other things – build manufacturing capabilities in Singapore and develop talent in the medtech sector.

timogh@sph.com.sg