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TO SEATTLE

TOP 25

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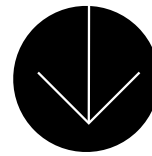
THE TOP 25 INNOVATORS & ENTREPRENEURS



PORTRAIT BY HAYLEY YOUNG

Dr. Ryo Kubota

Chairman, president & CEO, Acucela Inc.
[BOTHELL, ACUCELA.COM]



BIOSCIENCE

As a respected pioneer in ophthalmology, Dr. Ryo Kubota says he used to feel frustration over the lack of treatment options for a common ailment called “dry age-related macular degeneration,” or dry AMD. After conducting research on the condition during the past four years, his company, Acucela, may be on the verge of a breakthrough that could save the eyesight of 26 million dry-AMD sufferers worldwide.

Kubota’s eureka moment came seven years ago with the discovery that the process of sight itself—the chemical conversion of photons into electrical impulses inside the retina—produces toxins that, in excess, can lead to potentially blinding conditions such as dry AMD, Stargardt disease and diabetic retinopathy. Working with a team of researchers, Acucela has developed a molecule, called ACU-4429, which can slow down this “visual cycle” and, thus, reduce the amount of toxins produced.

Since early 2008, the treatment, which Kubota describes as “molecular sunglasses,” has undergone clinical trials and shown great promise with very few harmful side effects. As ACU-4429 moves into Phase II clinical trials by the end of this year, Kubota says Acucela is “cash-flow positive” with the help of \$40 million in recent venture rounds and a \$258 million development agreement with Japan’s Otsuka Pharmaceutical. —Randy Woods



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