

## Coronavirus crisis: WA-founded biotech companies making fighting virus war from the east

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Recce Pharmaceuticals is among dozens of WA-founded biotech companies that are making serious waves in the medical research sector, with COVID-19 the latest disease in its sights.



Recce Pharmaceuticals Executive Director Michele Dilizia. Credit: Danella Bevis/The West Australian

But industry leaders are lamenting the fact WA is missing out on more than \$47 million every year because companies are migrating to the east, where they spend their capital.

Shares in Recce, which is now based in Sydney but still has a research centre in Perth, surged 26.6 per cent to \$1.45 last week after a US-based respiratory treatment company selected two of its synthetic drugs to combat COVID-19 infections.

The chosen compounds were RECCE® 327, a broad-spectrum synthetic antibiotic used to treat blood infections and sepsis, and RECCE® 529, a synthetic polymer used to treat infections. The CSIRO is also studying RECCE® 327 against COVID-19.

Medical scientist Michele Dilizia, who works at Recce's microbiology lab

in Bentley, said a synthetic antibiotic worked like a "master key" and would avoid the problem of mutations and resistance.

"It will treat COVID, so it's not a vaccine and you could view that as a strength because viruses mutate all the time – that's why we need a new flu injection every year," she said.

"We're addressing the problem of hyper mutation with a universal mechanism of action. We have confidence we will have anti-viral activity against the SARS-CoVID-2 virus that causes COVID-19."

But Recce Executive Director James Graham said the company, founded by former Johnson and Johnson Asia Pacific research director Dr Graham Melrose, was "not just a COVID pop-up shop".

Mr Graham said Recce was now turning its attention to two clinical trials running

in parallel – one will seek to assess the unmet medical need of sepsis, while the other will focus on reducing the clinical burden of topical wound infections. The latter trial would start immediately at a major Perth teaching hospital pending WA Health's decision on an ethics submission, expected soon.

Recce, which relocated its head office from Perth in 2016, is one of many successful WA companies that have pulled up stumps.

Mr Graham, who grew up in Perth, said WA had "wonderful innovation but it doesn't have the infrastructure or consumer population to support anything of any real merit". ■