



Kazakhstan academic helps the fight against arthritis

WINNER

Image Analysis University spin-out of the year

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AN academic from Kazakhstan whose research could ease the pain of millions of arthritis sufferers is the driving force behind Image Analysis, which triumphed in the University Spin-Out category in the Yorkshire Post's Excellence in Business Awards.

Olga Kubassova was born in the town of Ust-Kamenogorsk, in Kazakhstan, in 1980. A talented mathematician, she headed for St Petersburg State University, in Russia, to take a BSc and later MSc in applied mathematics and mechanics.

She followed this up with a masters degree in computer science from the Finnish university of Lappeenranta.

With masters from both universities in the bag, she worked in a lab in Finland, but was hungry for a new challenge.

She recalled: "I spammed all the universities I could find on the web. I contacted maybe 100 universities, and I got a few replies, including one from Leeds." She'd never visited Leeds before, but successfully applied for the Dorothy Hodgkins Postgraduate Award in 2004, a scholarship that enables outstanding researchers from overseas to study in the UK.

After completing her studies, Ms Kubassova decided to use her research in a practical way by co-founding Image Analysis, a company that could speed up the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, a condition that affects two per cent of the population.

The Leeds-based company produces software products for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) equipment. It enables doctors to establish whether a patient is suffering from arthritis, and reduces the chances of human error. Image Analysis could give medics a vital "window of opportunity" to treat arthritis in its early stages. Ms Kubassova believes the same process might help to improve the survival rates from breast cancer.

Image Analysis was founded in 2007, and, with the help of a micro grant from Yorkshire Forward, developed its first product dedicated to the analysis of data from patients with rheumatoid arthritis. In June 2008, Ms Kubassova received the entrepreneur of the year award at Yorkshire Forward's fifth annual Yorkshire Bioscience Awards, which were held at the Thorpe Park Hotel in Leeds.



Image Analysis's core product – Dynamika – is being marketed to manufacturers of MRI equipment, the research and development departments of pharmaceutical companies, and general clinical markets.

Dynamika is already installed in hospitals in Poland, Britain, Denmark, Austria, and Italy.

Speaking after receiving the award, Ms Kubassova said: "This is a great honour. When I arrived in Leeds in 2004, I never believed in my wildest dreams that I would be at an event like this five years later. Yorkshire is a great place to be."