The new year is already bringing some welcomes news for HSV and it is just getting started. On January 3rd two companies, Becton, Dickinson and Company (BD) and Genocea Biosciences made important announcements regarding what they are doing for HSV.

Genocea Biosciences, a vaccine discovery and development entity, got a major boost when they secured $35 million Series B venture financing. The priority for the company is to target infectious diseases that have significant unmet medical needs. New investors that came with this deal were Johnson and Johnson Development Corporation Skyline Venture and MP Healthcare Venture Management. This is welcomed news for HSV because funding will support the company as it enters clinical development for its lead program, a therapeutic vaccine for herpes simplex virus type 2 infections.

On the same day Genocea released their announcement, BD announced their filing for 501k clearance for an automated molecular test to diagnose and differentiate between HSV-1 and HSV-2. Why the push to develop an automated test? Because as the company states “Data suggest that laboratories using existing culture methods to diagnose HSV often experience significant false negative rates, missing up to 25 percent of true positive cases. In addition, many clinicians and laboratories do not distinguish between HSV-1 and HSV-2.” Their test hopes to address these issues and it promises to do it in significantly less time.

Currently, the widely available method to diagnose herpes is via culture. Culture test are performed by taking a sample of the infected area and put in a tissue culture. Once cell
changes occur the lab performs additional test to determine HSV infection. PCR test, polymerase chain reaction test, operates by making multiple copies of viral DNA in order to determine HSV infection. While both methods are used in many labs, PCR has been noted as being more accurate but not as widely available as the culture. However, with the advances BD has made with their automated test this could possibly change and also could bring more standardization to gene amplified testing among labs that perform this test.

Additionally, instead of days or weeks to get culture results, BD asserts that their automated test will be able to read close to 100 positive or negative results in less than three hours. The system that the test will run on will also have the ability to multitask i.e. the system will be able to run not only run the test for HSV-1 and HSV-2 on a single run but it will be also able to run chlamydia and gonorrhea test at the same time.