



Largest academic-industry collaboration for drug discovery in depression and schizophrenia launched

An international consortium of scientists, led by H. Lundbeck A/S and King's College London, has launched one of the largest ever research academic-industry collaboration projects to find new methods for the development of drugs for schizophrenia and depression.

Novel Methods leading to New Medications in Depression and Schizophrenia (NEWMEDS) is a unique project, bringing together top scientists from academic institutions with a wide range of expertise, and partnering them with nearly all major global drugs companies including AstraZeneca, Eli Lilly, GlaxoSmithKline, Janssen Pharmaceutica, Novartis, Orion, Pfizer, Roche, Servier and Wyeth.

Other academic institutions involved are: Karolinska Institutet (Sweden), The University of Cambridge (United Kingdom), Central Institute of Mental Health (Germany), CSIC (Spain), the University of Manchester (United Kingdom) and the Bar Ilan University (Israel). A further two pharmaceutical small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), deCODE (Iceland) and Psynova (United Kingdom) will contribute to the success of NEWMEDS, while the SME GABO:mi (Germany) will be managing the project.

With a wealth of new knowledge and research findings related to schizophrenia and depression emerging every year, it has been hard to take these findings from the bench to the clinic. The researchers believe there to be three major bottlenecks that are holding the field back:

- i) a lack of accurate animal models to guide the drug discovery,
 - ii) a lack of tools and tests in healthy volunteers that can provide early indication of efficacy; and
 - iii) the reliance of clinical trials on symptom-based Diagnostic and Statistical Manual categories which inevitably leads to biologically heterogeneous groups of patients.
- NEWMEDS aims to overcome these limitations with a novel approach to drug discovery and strong collaboration within the consortium.

The main objective of NEWMEDS is to develop new models and methods to enable novel treatments for schizophrenia and depression. The project will focus on developing new animal models which use brain recording and behavioural tests to identify innovative and effective drugs for schizophrenia. The project will develop standardised paradigms, acquisition and analysis techniques to apply brain imaging, especially fMRI and PET imaging to drug development. It will examine how new genetic findings (duplication and deletion or changes in genes) influence the response to various drugs and whether this information can be used to choose the right drug for the right patient. And finally, it will try and develop new approaches for shorter and more efficient trials of new medication – trials that may require fewer patients and give faster results.

Dr. Tine Bryan Stensbøl, Divisional Director for Discovery Pharmacology Research at H. Lundbeck A/S, Coordinator of the NEWMEDS consortium comments: *'Academia and industry have a long tradition of working together on a one-on-one basis. NEWMEDS embodies a novel collaborative effort where companies join forces and together with academia answer scientific questions in a precompetitive environment that will form the basis of tomorrow's medicines. This joint effort will provide novel insights that undoubtedly will be of the benefit of the patients suffering from schizophrenia and depression.'*

Professor Dr Shitij Kapur, Leader of the Managing Entity from the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London comments: *'NEWMEDS is a very timely experiment. While the biology of psychiatry has made remarkable progress, we have been slow in converting that into innovative and new medications. This is a joint challenge for academia and industry. NEWMEDS is a joint response. It is not only scientifically innovative, but, it is also an innovation in creating a cluster of nearly 50 scientists from both sides to work together to achieve a common goal – better, safer and more effective medications – more quickly.'*

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The project is funded by the Innovative Medicines Initiative, a young and unique public-private partnership between the pharmaceutical industry (represented by the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations, EFPIA) and the European Union (represented by the European Commission).

IMI aims to put Europe at the forefront of biopharmaceutical innovation and to support more efficient discovery and development of better medicines for patients.

IMI's innovative funding scheme has a budget of €1 billion from the European Union's 'Seventh Framework' Programme (FP7/2007-2013). That amount will be matched by in kind contributions of at least another €1 billion euro from the EFPIA member companies.

More information about the Innovative Medicines Initiative: www.imi.europa.eu

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