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# Novartis Foundation to close its doors

Having given nearly 60 years of intellectual succour and hospitality to biomedical scientists from around the world, London's Novartis Foundation will close at the end of February. Its historic building will probably be taken over by the Academy of Medical Sciences charity, which is unlikely to be able to afford to continue the foundation's tradition of intimate symposia.

Established in 1949 as a scientific meeting house by the Swiss drug company Ciba-Geigy, the foundation launched its series of intensive three-day symposia the following year. The formula of the symposia, with their extensive discussions and accompanying open discussion meetings, was

similar to that of the Gordon Research Conferences, based in West Kingston, Rhode Island. The foundation has run more than 400 symposia, as well as a publishing programme and other activities. Between conferences, any scientist visiting London from around the world could stay at the foundation, chat with other guests over the huge, maple-wood breakfast table and enjoy the library and lounge.

In 1996, Ciba-Geigy was merged into the pharmaceutical giant Novartis, which moved its research headquarters from Basel to Boston, Massachusetts, in 2002. Soon after, Novartis decided that the foundation was no longer relevant to its interests. "The meetings did not allow us to

maximize our impact," says a company spokesman. Quiet attempts by the directors and trustees of the foundation to find a new corporate sponsor failed. Negotiations are now being completed for the transfer of the premises to the burgeoning Academy of Medical Sciences, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year.

In a statement, the academy says that it would like to "build on the scholarly tradition" of the foundation and retain the reputation of its building as a "hub for scientific exchange and networking". But the academy is strapped for cash and a continuation of the international meetings is thought unlikely.

Scientists will miss the institution sorely. "It has been an academic haven in the centre of London," says neuroscientist Colin Blakemore of the University of Oxford, UK, a member of the foundation's executive council. ■

**Alison Abbott**

**See Editorial, page 224.**



The Novartis Foundation is widely renowned for its symposia.