EDITORIAL

MORE TO THE FORE

This issue introduces changes to the front half of the journal, including the launch of an expanded news section incorporating feature-length stories that will investigate key questions in drug discovery and development. The first of these features highlights the challenge of applying cancer microarray data in clinical practice.

In Orlando this month, around 30,000 oncologists will gather for one of the major conferences in the field, the American Society for Clinical Oncology annual meeting. As always, hot topics of discussion are likely to include the latest results on pioneering drugs. But despite the encouraging success of some targeted therapies so far, the complexity of cancer means that in many cases we are still a considerable way from the dramatic improvement in treatment outcomes eagerly anticipated since cancer was first described as a genetic disease around 20 years ago.

A key to achieving such improvements is pinpointing which cancer patients are most likely to respond to particular treatments. Large amounts of microarray data have been collected in an attempt to accomplish this by identifying patterns of gene expression that might allow such patients to be readily recognized. However, although several high-profile research papers have raised expectations for the clinical application of such data, the development of microarray-based diagnostic tests for routine clinical use is proving much harder than hoped. Why?

Our inaugural news feature aims to shed some light on this question. In the coming months, these stories — whose longer format provides scope for delving into the complexity that typically underlies the most vexing issues in drug discovery and development — will seek to bring together the opinions of thought-leaders on how to respond to the challenge being discussed. As highlighted on p 362 of this issue, in the case of microarray experiments for cancer diagnostics, it is apparent that rigorous validation of the data, and tackling the familiar issue of multidisciplinary integration, could do much to facilitate the leap from published microarray data to its widespread clinical application.

There are additional changes to our news section, intended both to expand the service we provide, and to make the information within the section as accessible as possible. Our regular new stories now occupy three full pages, with two further pages of news 'in-briefs' in a new format. Furthermore, in addition to our original goal of exploring the science behind the top stories, we will be including more pieces focused on the business of drug discovery and development. For example, the article on p 358 reports on the recent merger of two of Japan's biggest pharmaceutical companies, and analyses the factors, such as legislative changes, that are driving companies in Japan to take the merger route in order to maintain competitiveness with major companies elsewhere.

Completing the changes to the front half of the journal, this month sees our 'Perspectives' section, which has been tucked away at the back of the journal since our launch, brought into the spotlight at the front. Articles in this section will continue to provide viewpoints on important issues across the spectrum of drug discovery and development, but with an increased focus on broad accessibility and ease of reading. Reflecting the cancer theme running through several of the articles in this issue, for example, is a Perspective on p 375 suggesting how academia, biotech and the pharma industry can best combine their resources to exploit the wealth of data generated on the molecular basis of cancer to accelerate the discovery of new anticancer drugs.

Finally, continuing with the topic of new anticancer therapies, this month we are pleased to provide subscribers to *Nature Reviews Drug Discovery* with 'Hot Drugs Cancer 2005', a collection of short articles on all the new anticancer drugs approved by the US FDA last year, based on the format of our regular 'Fresh from the Pipeline' section. The content of this supplement will also be available on a dedicated website at http://www.nature.com/nrd/focus/hotdrugs/2005/index.html. As with last year's similar supplement, we hope that this will form a valuable reference manual for anyone interested in recent successes in drug discovery and development, and perhaps provide the opportunity to gain from the experience of others.