

## April Updates: People and Places

### Support for moth alternatives

Dr. Olivia Champion and Professor Richard Titball have received two £12,000 grants to study the viability of wax moth larvae as alternatives to mice and other mammalian models in drug testing and research. The pair, scientists at the University of Exeter, founded BioSystems Technology in 2016 to provide moth larvae to other researchers under the brand name TruLarv. In a press release, Dr. Champion commented that scientists had been using moth larvae—often purchased at bait shops—in their research for several years, which prompted the creation of BioSystems to supply reliable, cheap larvae.

The first grant, provided by the NC3Rs, will support a partnership with Envigo, a contract research organization, while the second, provided by CRACK IT solutions, will support another partnership with antibiotic company Demuris. With Envigo, larvae will be evaluated in drug toxicity testing as alternatives to mice and rats. With Demuris, the scientists will test if the larvae can be used to identify leads for potential new antibiotics.

### Crown Bioscience expansions

Crown Bioscience, a Santa Clara, CA-based drug discovery and development company focused on oncology and metabolic disease research, has announced plans to expand its Life Science division in 2017. Debby Saunders has been appointed Executive Director of Life Sciences Development and will direct sales and marketing as CrownBio works to expand its *in vivo* and *in vitro* oncology products. As part of the effort, the company plans to double the number of recombinant cell lines they offer. They will

also be adding new capabilities for researching inflammatory diseases, appointing Dr. Joel Tocker as Executive Director and Head of the new Inflammation division.

The company is also continuing work on its digital strategy, announcing improvements to its OncoExpress web application, soft launched in 2016, and the release of a mobile version. The applications are designed to offer users access to model data from CrownBio's three propriety oncology databases.

### Exemplar minipigs

Exemplar Genetics, a subsidiary of Intrexon Corporation, has won a subcontract to create genetically engineered mini-swine models of sickle cell disease for the NIH National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS). Exemplar's subcontract will be under prime contractor Leidos Biomedical Research, Inc. In a press release, Exemplar President John R. Swart commented, "We believe these models will be an excellent resource for the research community to help enable significant advancements in the understanding of sickle cell disease mechanisms, ultimately leading to new treatments. The Leidos subcontract serves as further recognition that better models are needed and genetically engineered porcine models can fill that void." Exemplar will work to develop several different minipig models for NCATS that more accurately replicate human pathology than traditional models.

### Academic consortium to treat epilepsy after traumatic brain injury

The National Institutes of Health has awarded a five-year, \$21 million grant to

seven principal investigators at five institutions to study and develop treatments to prevent epilepsy following traumatic brain injury. The consortium will be led by Dr. Jerome Engel Jr. and the University of California Los Angeles, which operates the Seizure Disorder Center and the Brain Injury Research Center and will receive \$7.5 million.

The principal investigators on the grant are Dr. Engel, the overall director, and Dr. Paul Vespa of the Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA; Dr. Aristeia Galanopoulou, and Dr. Solomon Moshé of Albert Einstein College of Medicine/Montefiore Health System; Dr. Terence O'Brien of the University of Melbourne; Dr. Asla Pitkänen of the University of Eastern Finland; and Arthur Toga of the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California.

### Atrapos receives awards to continue asthma research

Atrapos Therapeutics, LLC has won awards from the National Institute of Health and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute to continue development work on their anti-asthma drug PM-431. Under the NIH award, the preclinical pharmaceutical company will partner with The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and Baylor College of Medicine to continue evaluating the potential of PM-431 as an alternative to steroids in treating asthma. PM-431 was identified by John McMurray at MD Anderson and David Corry at Baylor and has shown promise in preclinical research in mouse models. Atrapos received their exclusive license to the technology from MD Anderson.