

## Tech billionaires fund new cancer centers

Oracle's Larry Ellison donated \$200 million for a new cancer center in Los Angeles, and the co-founder of Napster and Facebook's first president, Sean Parker, earmarked \$250 million from the Parker Foundation to bring together researchers at six different sites to develop cancer immunotherapies. Ellison, who is executive chairman of the board and chief technology officer at Oracle, donated the funds to establish a new cancer center where research laboratories and clinics operate in the same building. The Lawrence J. Ellison Institute for Transformative Medicine of USC will be led by David B. Agus, professor at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and USC Viterbi School of Engineering. The institute will take an interdisciplinary approach to cancer research combined with prevention and treatment. The \$250 million gift for the Parker Institute for Cancer Immunotherapy will go to over 300 researchers at 40 different laboratories to share and facilitate access to different technologies and expertise in immune therapies. Each of the six centers involved—the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center; Stanford Medicine; the University of California, Los Angeles; the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF); The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center; and the University of Pennsylvania—will individually receive \$10–15 million in the first year. UCSF immunologist Jeffrey Bluestone will be the institute's first president and CEO.

## AstraZeneca nabs genomics giants

AstraZeneca has lined up three partners to launch the biggest effort yet aimed at using genomic data to drive drug discovery. The deals signed in April bring together the London-based big pharma with Human Longevity (HLI) in San Diego, the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute in Hinxton, UK, and The University of Helsinki's Institute for Molecular Medicine Finland (FIMM). The initiative aims to integrate information from two million genome sequences with individual health data to reveal rare disease-causing mutations that may suggest new drug targets. The only other similar approach pursued thus far has been that of the Icelandic biotech deCODE Genetics, bought by Amgen in 2012 for its database containing information from 140,000 volunteers, though few were whole genome sequences. HLI will sequence half-a-million samples from participants in AstraZeneca's clinical studies and add its own collection of up to 1 million complete genomes, deploying its machine learning, and pattern recognition analysis techniques. FIMM will contribute sequenced genomes and samples from its biobank combined with files from its healthcare system. And with the Sanger Institute, AstraZeneca will share genomic samples and associated clinical data to identify new targets and biomarkers with potential use in diagnostic tests. AstraZeneca will also establish an in-house Centre for Genomics Research.

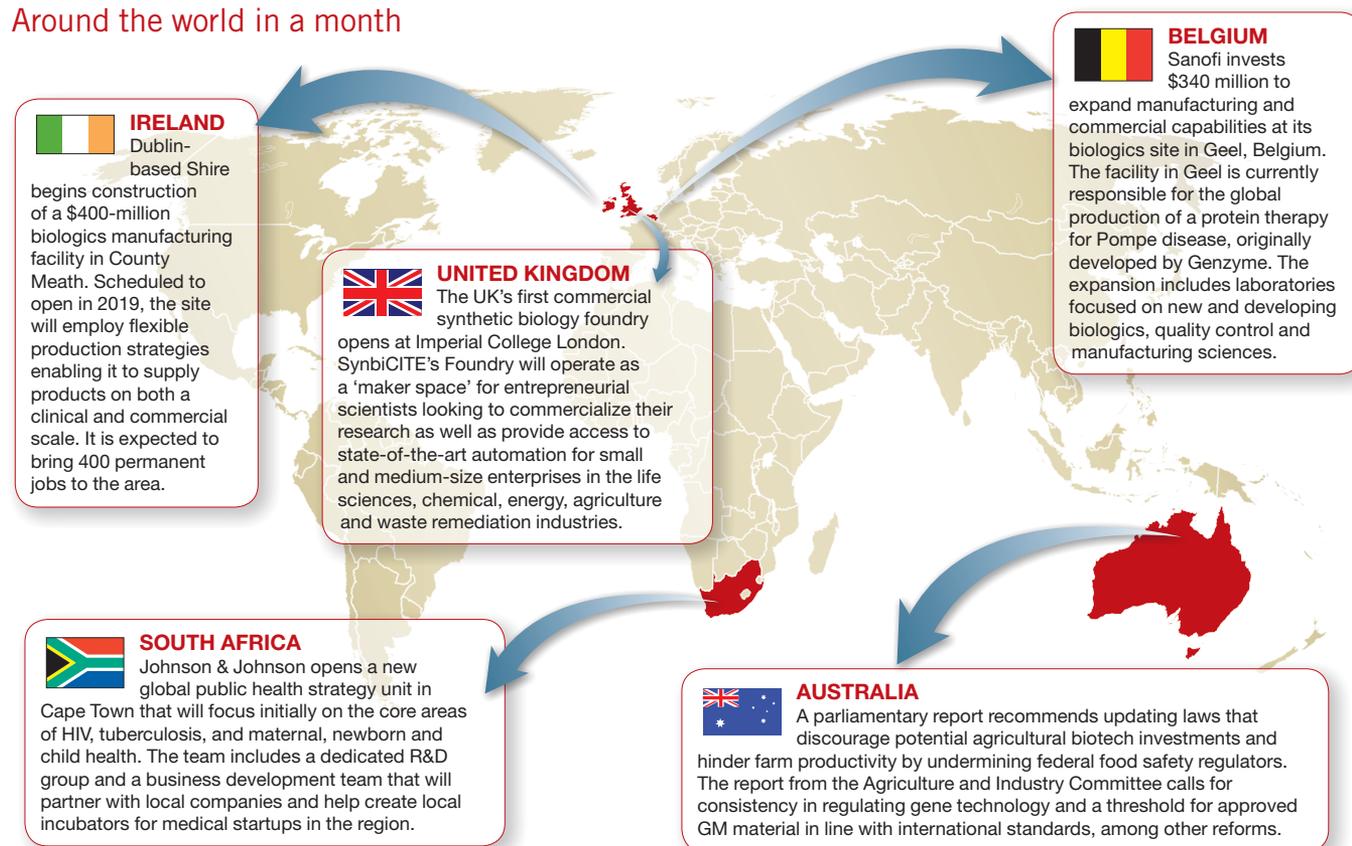
“We may do things with professional athletes that are maybe not proven, like regenerative medicine.” Brian Cole, team physician for the Chicago Bulls basketball team, claims that stem cell injections hasten athletes' healing and “at the very least, haven't shown evidence of being harmful.” (*Wired*, 28 April 2016)

“Ninety percent of companies fail, and investors are putting hundreds of millions of dollars over 10 to 15 years—they have to believe that if they win, they win big,” Ron Cohen, CEO of Acorda Therapeutics and board chair of the Biotechnology Innovative Organization, says in support of the present system of drug pricing. (*Bloomberg*, 9 May 2016)

“If we keep looking for the been-there-done-that CEO, or the veteran board member that we've served with before, or calling our same network on references, then we'll likely be recycling the same list of men.” Nina Kjellson, a general partner at Canaan Partners, addresses the gender gap in the biotech industry. (*Xconomy*, 10 May 2016)

“If you need secrecy to discuss your proposed research (synthesizing a human genome) you are doing something wrong.” Drew Endy of Stanford University tweets in response to a closed-door meeting at Harvard Medical School to debate an international project aiming to construct and test large genomes. (9 May 2016 @DrewEndy)

## Around the world in a month



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