COOPERATIVE RESEARCH

GENENTECH'S VIENNA VENTURE

VIENNA—Executives from Genentech (South San Francisco, CA) and Boehringer Ingelheim (Ingelheim, FRG) were thick on the ground in Vienna at the end of May for the opening of their joint Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP). Set up to generate product ideas for cancer therapy from a program of basic research in cell and molecular biology, IMP is the latest of several links formed between the two companies in the past seven years.

As the Genentech executives discovered, Vienna has many attractions as a city—but proximity to San Francisco and a reputation for modern biological research are not among them. Why then was it chosen as the location for IMP? One reason was the generosity of the city's offer, which included a promise to relocate some of the university's research institutes to the same site as IMP. The other was the location in Vienna of Bender, a small subsidiary of Boehringer Ingelheim, making the city a reasonable compromise between Boehringer's desire to have the institute in the vicinity of one of its R&D facilities

and Genentech's strong view that it should not be in West Germany.

It is at Bender that Boehringer produces its own recombinant alpha-2 and omega interferons, and carries out its side of the joint projects with Genentech for the production of gamma interferon and tumor necrosis factors alpha and beta. Interferon gamma is still in clinical trials, but is expected to find a lead use soon, says Franz Waldeck, Boehringer Ingelheim's research director. But the future of tumor necrosis factor is in the balance, he says, and will be decided this year.

Meanwhile, the two companies are jointly forging ahead with the production and sale of tissue plasminogen activator (t-PA). Boehringer has marketing rights to t-PA everywhere except the United States and Japan. In Canada, the two companies have formed the joint marketing company Genentech Canada.

Boehringer now sells t-PA made at its Karl Thomas (Biberach, FRG) subsidiary, where an \$85-million eukaryotic-cell facility has recently been completed. Production of t-PA there

came on stream last year.

By its association with Genentech, five percent of which it owns, Boehringer Ingelheim has been able to gain access to the best of recombinant DNA technology, and a share in some of the early profits therefrom. For its part, Genentech is able to learn a great deal concerning clinical trials, approval procedures, and marketing from one of the 20 largest pharmaceutical companies in the world.

How good the two companies will be as parents of IMP has yet to be seen. They will jointly own any products that emerge from research at the institute. Since IMP's program of research is barely distinguishable from that in many academic laboratories, however, immediate product leads are not necessarily expected. Since Genentech has contributed know-how rather than money towards IMP's first few years, it can afford to be reasonably patient. But both companies will undoubtedly become increasingly unhappy if nothing of importance emerges as IMP heads towards completion of its initial 12-year term.

—Peter Newmark

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