Novartis moves research HQ to US

In one of the clearest signals yet that Novartis is making efforts to increase its US stature, the pharmaceutical company announced last month that it is to move the job of Head of Global Research from Basel in Switzerland to Cambridge, Massachusetts. In addition, the company's decision to appoint cardiovascular scientist, Mark Fishman, as the new Head of Global Research represents Novartis' determination to redefine its cardiovascular research strategy.

Four hundred scientists will be recruited to the new Cambridge-based Novartis Institute for Biomedical Research (NIBR), and this number will grow to 900 over the next 18 months. Overall, Fishman will direct the work of around 3,000 scientists worldwide that are involved in the discovery side of Novartis' R&D effort, that is, basic research, and he will preside over a research budget of 1 billion Swiss francs (US \$628 million).

Fishman takes over from current research chief Paul Herrling, who will remain in Basel heading special projects such as the company's tropical disease research institute in Singapore. In addition to directing global research, Fishman will also join Novartis' Executive Committee as its only American. Until now, he was Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, Chief of the Cardiology Division and Director of Cardiovascular Research at Massachusetts General Hospital, and is internationally renowned for using large-scale mutagenesis screening in zebrafish to characterize the genetics of human cardiovascular development and function. He will establish an in-house aquaculture system for Novartis.

Herrling told *Nature Medicine* why the company wanted Fishman: "We were really looking for someone very close to modern biology, and of course with his expertise in functional genomics and the zebrafish as a model to discover biological pathways, Mark Fishman is exactly the person we were looking for. The fact that he is doing it in the cardiovascular field is extremely positive because we're in the process of redesigning our cardiovascular research strategy."

Novartis' lead medicines include the hypertension drug, Diovan, an inhibitor of angiotensin II-converting enzyme inhibitor worth US \$1.2 billion in annual sales. With such a successful product, why is there a need to revamp the cardiovascu-

lar strategy? Herrling explains, "Eight or so years ago, many people thought that the cardiovascular area was well covered and medical need was taken care of. Our cardiovascular program was reduced and reallocated to other areas. However, now, due to the breakthroughs in genomics, there are new approaches to cardiovascular diseases. There are still a large number of people with hypertension that don't react to conventional drugs. There are also conditions such as cardiac failure and atherosclerosis that aren't properly treated. So we decided to kick-start our research and Mark Fishman is the perfect choice. Mark has been specifically developing the zebrafish to study cardiac pathways and this is where

we hope to find new relevant targets that are linked to the cause of these diseases. The new institute will have a lot of fish tanks!"

Academic partnership or parasitism?

In allowing the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Charles Vest, to make the important announcements on 6 May, Novartis demonstrated its eagerness to be closely associated with the academic community that has come to dominate the Boston landscape. MIT neighbors Boston University, and Harvard University, which has a renowned medical school and school of public health. The area also has first-

Fishman takes zebrafish to Novartis

Novartis has recruited academic researcher, Mark Fishman, the director of the Cardiovascular Research Center at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) to head its global research operations. Fishman is internationally renowned for his large-scale zebrafish mutagenesis program through which he has elucidated the genetic pathways of the heart and vascular system.

The Swiss-based pharmaceutical company is to establish a new \$250 million Novartis Institute for Biomedical Research based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from where Fishman will oversee Novartis' research in Europe, the US and Japan. The Cambridge site will initially be staffed by 400 scientists with the potential to expand to 900 by the start of 2005. The company has leased a building from the Massachusetts Institutes of Technology so that its new labs will be in a neighborhood already populated with academics, clinicians and biotechnology companies such as Biogen and Genzyme.

Aside from a three-year fellowship at the National Institutes of Health, Fishman has been based at MGH since receiving his undergraduate degree at Yale in 1972 and received his MD from Harvard in 1976. He was appointed director of the Cardiovascular Research Center in 1990, and has been Chief of Cardiology at MGH for the past five years. Using the zebrafish model, his lab has identified over 100 ge-

netic mutations that effect the formation and function of the cardiovascular system. For example, mutations in the *slow mo* gene result in bradycardia, and the *gridlock* gene is required for the assembly of the aorta.

Fishman says his ability to juggle jobs will equip him well for the new post. "I've done a lot of medicine and I've done a lot

of fundamental science," he told *Nature Medicine*. "I've managed a big cardiology division, I've trained a lot of people and I am imbedded in the academia." He is also no stranger to industry. Squibb, now part of Bristol-Myers Squibb, funded the Cardiovascular Research Center and Genentech helps pay for the zebrafish work. Of his

new role he says, "I'm trying to merge academia with industry. There is a huge domain in which they overlap and in that domain, we can start a whole new culture of science."

If anyone can handle a job like the Novartis post, Fishman can, says friend and former colleague Nadia Rosenthal. She describes him as "tough" but accessible and human. "He has an adventurous spirit and he enjoys taking risks," says Rosenthal, who now heads the mouse biology program at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Rome.

Tinker Ready, Boston

Fishman to lead industrial research