

IN THE NEWS

Consortium promises RNAi for all

RNAi will soon be cheap and easy for all researchers, according to the founders of a large-scale collaboration between industry and academia.

The RNAi Consortium is a partnership between four pharmaceutical companies and seven academic institutions, and is set to receive an impressive US\$18 million of funding over 3 years. Its aim is to provide libraries of short-hairpin RNAs that can efficiently silence almost any human or mouse gene.

“These 11 world-class entities will make common cause in a unique collaborative group to create a public good: a comprehensive set of reagents to be used in thousands of laboratories,” said Eric Lander, director of the Broad Institute and one of the principal investigators involved in the consortium.

As well as accelerating basic research, a key goal is to promote biomedical applications. “In order to advance pharmaceutical science, fundamental tools like RNAi need to be made available and accessible to scientists around the world,” explained Mark Fishman, president of the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical research.

Another aim of the consortium is to increase the efficiency of RNAi technology. Improved protocols for reagent preparation, along with the development of high-throughput screening techniques, should help to make experiments quicker and more economic.

As Fishman points out, “the RNAi Consortium is an excellent example of how industry and academia can work together.” Of course, the companies and institutes involved stand to gain from the venture in terms of commercial opportunities, but the consortium certainly highlights how partnerships between the public and private sectors can bring benefits all round.

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