

Lilac—the new blue?

Whiskey maker Suntory (Tokyo) and Australian firm Florigene (Melbourne) took 20 years to make the first blue biotech roses by inserting the flavonoid 3',5'-hydroxylase gene that leads to the synthesis of blue pigment delphinidin in pansies. The flowers have been sold at florists in Japan since November for up to \$33 a stem—10 times more expensive than other roses. 'Blue gene technology' notwithstanding, the roses still lack the true Royal Blue touch.



AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi

IN brief

Sequencing firms' court battle

Life Technologies has filed a patent infringement lawsuit against Illumina of San Diego and its Solexa subsidiary, to which the latter promptly responded with a countersuit. Life Technologies of Carlsbad, California, and its subsidiary Applied Biosystems (ABI) contend Illumina's Genome Analyzer products violate ABI patents describing nucleic acid amplification technology in which the clonal amplification products remain in a fixed location. Illumina and Solexa have denied all the allegations and are charging that Life Technologies' SOLiD sequencing system infringes four Solexa patents related to sample preparation, data gathering and genome analysis. "This is completely normal," says David Resnick of Nixon Peabody in Boston. "It's just the dance they do." The DNA sequencing companies have been engaged in this dance for some time already. In December 2006 ABI sued its former IP counsel, Stephen Macevitz, along with Illumina and Solexa, alleging he filed patents while working for Lynx Therapeutics (which later merged with Solexa) that he should have filed on behalf of ABI. In response, Illumina and Solexa charged that ABI's SOLiD system infringes several Solexa patents. Jury decisions thus far have fallen both ways suggesting little will change as a result of the latest litigations. In January, for example, a California jury reaffirmed Illumina's ownership of the disputed patent, whereas another jury pronounced that ABI did not infringe at least two other Solexa patents. The lawsuits are only likely to end, Resnick believes, "When they decide they've spent enough money on it."

Malorye Allison

GSK hosts new biotech park

London-based GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) is teaming up with the UK government, the East of England Development (EEDA) agency and the Wellcome Trust to pioneer a new model of open innovation. With an initial funding of almost £38 (\$63) million, the biotech campus will be based at GSK's Stevenage site and aims to attract early-stage companies. GSK will invest £11 million, land and facilities; the government's Department of Business, Innovation and Skills will add nearly £12 million and the UK Technology Strategy Board, £5 million; the Wellcome Trust will put in around £6 million and EEDA, £4 million. Companies will have shared access to GSK's specialist skills, expertise and equipment, and operate on an open innovation model, with an emphasis on collaboration and knowledge sharing. "This will be the first open innovation campus in the pharma sector," Hunter said. "This initiative is not just for GSK's benefit," explained Jackie Hunter, the park's sponsor within GSK. "It is also about translating the UK's excellent science into bioscience companies." She added that all pharma companies now have the stated intention of having more collaboration with biotech, and it is hoped that the new park will provide an attractive location. Several companies have already expressed an interest, and, when complete, the park will house around 1,500 scientists.

Susan Aldridge

IN their words



"Millions demand it, millions refuse it and millions more don't know what to think."

FierceBiotech Editor-in-Chief John Carroll neatly sums up the public health delivery and communication challenges that threaten to derail the H1N1

influenza vaccine campaign. (*FierceBiotech*, October 23, 2009)

"At any number of levels, it's alarming." Stephen Aby, professor of bibliography at the University of Akron in Ohio, where a new policy requires prospective staff to submit to genetic testing for criminal background checks. (CBS News, October 29, 2009)

"I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I just really don't know." Senator Max Baucus, Democrat of Montana, on his health plan's

chances of passing. (*New York Times*, October 28, 2009)

"A force multiplier with respect to genome-wide association studies." Researcher Cathy Schaeffer of insurance giant Kaiser Permanente in Oakland, California, describes the \$25 million National Institutes of Health-funded program to collect single nucleotide polymorphism and health data from 100,000 older Californians. (*Technology Review*, October 21, 2009)

"One of the long-term goals of gene therapy is to develop medicines you can take off the shelf and inject into a patient—medicine in a bottle. This is an example of where that has worked." Katherine High, of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, comments on the phase 1 study in which she participated, published in the *Lancet* (374, 1597–1605, 2009), in which gene therapy using retinal pigment epithelium-specific protein (RPE65) improved the sight of 6 out of 12 patients with Leber's congenital amaurosis. (*Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 2009)