

## **University of California and Boehringer Mannheim join forces to form molecular medicine company**

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Representatives of the University of California and Boehringer Mannheim Corporation today signed an operating agreement to create a limited liability corporation that will produce vectors for gene and cell therapy, as well as cellular and molecular diagnostic tests.

The company, called Molecular Medicine LLC, will operate initially out of offices at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), with the production site for molecular therapeutics located on UCSD's School of Medicine campus. The production center will expand upon the activities of the Clinical Applications Laboratory of UCSD's Program in Human Gene Therapy. The laboratory is a state-certified center for the preparation of viral vectors and genetic material used in gene therapy protocols.

"This partnership represents a collaboration between academia and the commercial world which gives us new ways to respond to the vast opportunities and challenges of modern medicine and biotechnology," said UCSD Chancellor Robert C. Dynes. "I could not be more pleased that this collaboration involves two giants of modern biomedicine, UCSD and the Boehringer Mannheim Corporation, working together to bring the miracles of modern biology and genetics to the bedside."

"Boehringer Mannheim succeeded in recent years by moving the laboratory to the patient with blood glucose self-monitoring, enabling diabetics to lead more normal lives. Now we are excited as we help develop a new generation of advanced medical tools, enabling physicians to bring custom gene therapies to the patient," said Gerald Miller, CEO of the Boehringer Mannheim Group.

The Boehringer Mannheim Corporation (BMC), based in Indianapolis, is the United States regional headquarters for the world-wide Boehringer Mannheim Group, a German-based pharmaceutical company that is second in the world for molecular diagnostics tests. BMC specializes in diagnostics, biochemistry and therapeutics. The UCSD Program in Human Gene Therapy was established in 1995 to provide a focal point for the pioneering work of UCSD's molecular biologists and support the translation of work taking place in the research laboratories into clinical applications that could eventually benefit patients.

Gene therapy has the potential to correct disease at the most fundamental level. The process involves identifying and isolating specific genes which, when they malfunction, are associated with disease, and then delivering functional genes to the cells in a vector--a non-viral or viral agent that has been disarmed of disease-causing properties. These genetically armed vectors seek out and "infect" the targeted cells with the desired gene, which replaces a defective gene or activates the patient's own cells to fight the disease process.

For promising therapies to be advanced to clinical trial involving patients, the therapeutic vectors must be manufactured in quantity under strict state and federal regulations assuring the production of pharmaceutical-

grade gene therapy materials. These products are now being made in UCSD's Clinical Applications Laboratory on the School of Medicine campus.

With the new LLC, this center can develop and grow as a resource for scientists and biotechnology companies which require high quality molecular medicine products as they advance to patient trials.

"Boehringer Mannheim is honored to be selected as UCSD's partner in this joint venture. The role of the LLC will be to accelerate the output of both academic research and industrial development toward social benefit in the form of treatment and monitoring of diseases which are difficult or impossible to manage today," said Dennert O. Ware, president and CEO of the Boehringer Mannheim Corporation, U.S.

"Our research excellence in genetics and molecular medicine is well-established," said UCSD Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences John F. Alksne, M.D. "The development of safe therapeutic products for use in patient care is an important bridge between research findings and clinical application. The service center that results from this partnership with Boehringer Mannheim will speed the process for investigators who are exploring new treatments for genetic disease.

Under the terms of the operating agreement, BMC will contribute start-up and initial operating costs, and refurbish existing facilities on the UCSD campus. The LLC will be managed by a president selected by BMC and the University, and each partner will select members to serve on the management committee.

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