UCSD Institute Of Molecular Medicine Announces Beijing Partnership

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The University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Institute for Molecular Medicine (IMM) has announced the establishment of IMM-China, located in the new life science research facility at Beijing University.

The IMM-China will function as an autonomous sister institute, with coordinated activities in research, medical student and post-doctoral training, and even clinical research programs, according to Kenneth Chien, M.D., Ph.D., professor of medicine at the UCSD School of Medicine and director of the UCSD IMM.

Director of IMM-China is Rui-Ping Xiao, M.D., Ph.D., formerly head of the Receptor Signaling Unit in the Laboratory of Cardiovascular Science at the National Institute of Aging at the National Institutes of Health.

"China is poised to become a major biomedical research center, and to create opportunities for translational and clinical research to address some of the major health issues confronting their population," said Chien, a world-leader in cardiovascular science and medicine. "It is predicted that heart disease and associated metabolic and lipid disorders will affect over 100 million Chinese in the coming years, so their scientists and physicians have a strong interest in making progress in advancing diagnostic and therapeutic approaches to preventing and managing cardiovascular illness. We look forward to establishing multiple programs for our students and faculty to work together and learn from one another."

The announcement coincides with a symposium at UCSD on March 30 at the Price Center, co-sponsored by UCSD IMM and Nature Publishing Group, a Nature Forum 2004 program called "The China-California Connection: A Biomedical Alliance," featuring lectures and panel discussion by noted U.S. and Chinese scientists (for details, see http://health.ucsd.edu/news/2004/03_04_Chien.html)

"This partnership is an exciting step in our efforts to establish educational and research collaborations with important Pacific Rim institutions," said Edward W. Holmes, Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences and Dean of the School of Medicine at UCSD. "UCSD is one of the leading research institutions in the country, and we have a responsibility to our students and society to be active on the global stage. We are actively pursuing strategic relationships with clinical, research and educational institutions in Singapore and India, so I am delighted that Ken Chien and the IMM have formalized a partnership with Beijing as an important beginning in our UCSD-Pacific Rim biomedical initiative."

Chien noted that the human genome project was an international effort.

"The world came together to sequence the human genome. More than ever, science and medicine are practiced on a global scale, and this type of global cooperation is imperative to enable us to take advantage of unique opportunities at each of our institutions," he said. "One of our main objectives is to create exchange programs for graduate and professional students and other scholars, as well as forging new partnerships with the private sector, which will strengthen existing relationships and build new ones that support a global network of molecular medicine."

The UCSD Institute of Molecular Medicine was established as a "Center Without Walls," to train a cadre of physician/scientists in advanced molecular, cellular, genetic, and bioengineering approaches; to create opportunities for collaboration; and to advance research in molecular, cardiovascular, and neurological sciences, leading to new therapeutic approaches to treating and preventing human diseases. IMM is also a co-sponsor with the journal Nature of an annual international symposium, Days of Molecular Medicine, with this year's conference held recently at the Wellcome Trust Genome Campus in Cambridgeshire, U.K.

The initial focus of IMM-China will be cardiovascular and related metabolic diseases, with expansion into other fields planned as the program grows. Chien said some of the areas that will be strengthened through this partnership will be development of new models to study cardiovascular disease; analysis of disease mechanisms at the molecular level; and expanded opportunities for evaluation patient populations and human tissue samples in basic and pre-clinical research. The programs will also be developing large-scale programs in genomics, pharmacogenomics and genetics.

IMM and IMM-China representatives have signed a Memorandum of Understanding and are continuing to finalize the programmatic and operational details of this international collaboration.

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