

NIH, Industry Should Partner More, Collins Says

BY JOYCE FRIEDEN

WASHINGTON — The National Institutes of Health needs to partner more with the pharmaceutical industry in order to create a better pipeline for new drugs, Dr. Francis Collins said at the annual meeting of the Endocrine Society.

Dr. Collins, former head of the National Human Genome Research Institute who is widely rumored to be President Obama's pick for NIH director, said that with all the developments now occurring in genomic research, "pharmaceutical companies are a little overwhelmed about where to start" when it comes to figuring out which genes would make good targets for drug therapy.

"Academic investigators should get more intentionally involved in the translational process of going from basic research to drug development," Dr. Collins said. "There is an opportunity now, more than ever, to bring together academic investigators and the private sector to put together a really exciting version of a drug development pipeline."

Such a collaboration "involves more of academics taking the front-end risk of developing promising compounds so they become attractive and licensable by the private sector."

Dr. Collins noted that many academic researchers are identifying promising

targets for drugs, "but relatively few are taking that information and turning it into an assay ... to see if there is something promising that might turn out to become a therapeutic."

Some targets start out looking promising, but when they get to a point where they need support for preclinical development, "that's where things often die," he said. "Congress just a few months ago put \$24 million into the fiscal year 2009 budget to start this process in an NIH-funded way, and I hope the money will go up substantially in the next 5 years."

With such a pipeline, conflicts of interest on the part of pharmaceutical companies "would have to be factored in," Dr. Collins said in an interview.

Drugmakers' interests in commercialization would be a factor. "You want to start a project that is going to get somewhere," he said.

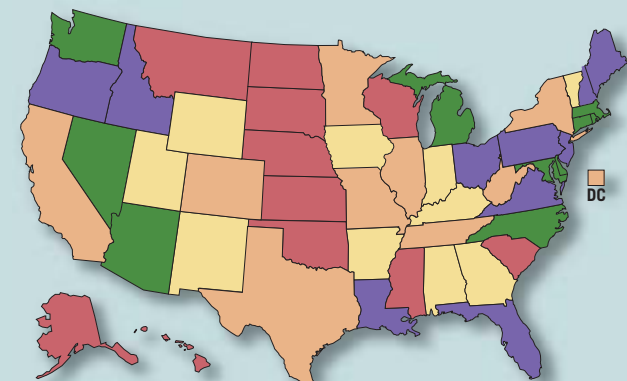
"But there are companies across the board that are interested in almost any disease—even very rare ones—as long as it won't cost a fortune to get that drug approved. For the rare diseases, you may have to push things further down the pipeline with public money before the company says, 'Okay, I'll start with that one now,' but I don't know that that should discourage consideration of working on even a very rare disease in this pipeline," he noted.

'There are companies across the board that are interested in almost any disease—even very rare ones—as long as it won't cost a fortune to get that drug approved.'

DATA WATCH

State Rankings for E-Prescribing Activity in 2007

Top 10 11-20 21-30 31-40 41-51 DC



Note: Rankings are based on numbers of prescriptions routed electronically, as percentages of total prescriptions eligible for electronic routing. Source: Pharmacy Health Information Exchange

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Actelion Pharmaceuticals US, Inc. Tacleer 8a-8b, 9	Endo Pharmaceuticals OPANA 11-14
Amgen and Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, Inc. Enbrel 30-32	Forest Laboratories, Inc. Savella 6a-6d, 28a-28d
Bayer HealthCare LLC Citracal 19	Genentech USA, Inc. and Biogen Idec Inc. Rituxan 3-5
Centocor Ortho Biotech Inc. Simponi 16a-16d	Roche Laboratories Inc. Corporate 23-25
Cypress Bioscience, Inc. AWISE PG 27	Savient Pharmaceuticals, Inc. Corporate 20-21

During a question-and-answer session, Dr. Collins was asked whether he would list his priorities for NIH "as a private citizen," since he couldn't address any possible nomination for the head job, a question that won laughter from the audience.

"We have an opportunity to take [the new technologies] that have started to appear and apply them in a vigorous way to understand fundamentals of biology; that would include genomics and nanotechnology and a wide variety of approaches to epigenetics," he said.

"I would also think we need to take seriously the charge coming from the Congress and the Administration to provide useful information to guide health care reform.

"That would mean, in some instances, comparative effectiveness research, but we need to be careful not to lose the personalized aspects of individual [health] along the way." Global health should also be an NIH focus, Dr. Collins said,

adding "The U.S. is in a position to spread more soft power instead of hard power around the world. NIH ought to be able to play a useful role in that. And we should encourage the research community, including young investigators, and increase the diversity of our workforce, to make it vigorous and effective." ■



Can't Find Your Last Issue?

You have **FREE** access to articles from this issue and past issues of **RHEUMATOLOGY NEWS** at www.rheumatologynews.com.

CLASSIFIEDS

www.rheumatologynews.com

PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

METRO SOUTH CAROLINA

Join well established three physician Rheumatology private practice in desirable Blue Ridge Mountain metro area two hours to Atlanta associated with a growing 450 bed three hospital health system. 1-4 call. Salary,bonus,benefits and future partnership.

DONOHUE AND ASSOCIATES
800-831-5475
F: 314-984-8246
E/M: donohueandassoc@aol.com

For information on Classifieds, contact Eric Kun, Elsevier-Rheumatology News, 360 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010. (212) 633-3746. FAX: (212) 633-3820. Email ad to: e.kun@elsevier.com

Disclaimer
RHEUMATOLOGY NEWS assumes the statements made in classified advertisements are accurate, but cannot investigate the statements and assumes no responsibility or liability concerning their content. The Publisher reserves the right to decline, withdraw, or edit advertisements. Every effort will be made to avoid mistakes, but responsibility cannot be accepted for clerical or printer errors.

Also available at www.elsevierhealthcareers.com