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Thermo Fisher Scientific Welcomes New Members to RNAi Global Initiative

Group Now Represents 31 Renowned Research Institutions

LAFAYETTE, Colo. (November 12, 2008) — Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc., the world leader in serving science, announced today that five new members have joined the RNAi Global initiative — an alliance of the Thermo Scientific Dharmacon Products team and leading international research centers.

Founded in 2005, the RNAi Global Initiative is advancing the use of whole-genome RNA-interference screening, an increasingly important tool in biological research and drug discovery. Members share information and develop common research standards to advance the productivity of RNAi gene-silencing techniques.

“We are gratified that institutions of this caliber continue to join the RNAi Global Initiative,” said Michael Deines, global director of marketing for genomics at Thermo Fisher Scientific. “Each new member brings unique expertise from different fields of study, illuminating new approaches to integrating RNAi into science and medicine.”

The new member institutions include the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) in New Delhi, India; the Diamantina Institute for Cancer, Immunology and Metabolic Medicine at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia; the University of Georgia, Department of Infectious Diseases, in Athens, Ga.; St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tenn., and the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

With the addition of the five new members, the RNAi Global Initiative represents 31 research institutions in 13 different countries. All of the members are using the Thermo Scientific Dharmacon whole-genome small-interfering RNA (siRNA) library in their research. According to Mr. Deines, the combined activities of the member institutes account for the majority of all genome-wide screening conducted globally.

At the **ICGEB**, Dr. Kanury V.S. Rao, senior scientist and head of the Immunology Group, is using whole-genome siRNA screening to study infectious diseases, focusing first on tuberculosis. With the technology, he hopes to learn how the tuberculosis bacteria use host proteins to survive and grow. Ultimately, the research may identify new targets for tuberculosis drugs.

“Tuberculosis is still a major health problem in this part of the world,” said Dr. Rao. “And it is reemerging globally due to the development of strains that are resistant to antibiotics.” Dr. Rao said his goal is to eventually find ways to disrupt the bacteria’s mechanism for using its host for survival, and this may avoid the problem of drug resistance. Dr. Rao believes participation in the RNAi Global Initiative will help him advance his research. “There are a lot of people in the group who have been doing genome-wide screening for a long time, and we will benefit from their experience and the support of the membership community.”

At the **Diamantina Institute** at the University of Queensland, the siRNA library will be part of a functional genomics platform that includes lentiviral cDNA and shRNA libraries and incorporates liquid-handling robotics and high-content analysis for cell-based assays. This platform will be used in research throughout the institute, including gene discovery and validation for many forms of cancers as well as potential applications in immunology and the study of obesity and diabetes. Professor Tom Gonda, deputy director and head of the Cancer Biology Program, is focusing on leukemia and breast cancer. One of his first applications of the siRNA library will be in the study of calcium regulators in breast cancer. His long-term goal is to identify new therapeutic targets and biomarkers.

As members of the RNAi Global Initiative, Prof. Gonda and his colleagues expect to benefit from the experience of other research groups doing similar work. “High-throughput functional genomics is still a very new field, and there is a lot of methodological development to be done in establishing platforms such as ours. Sharing information can help us avoid re-inventing the wheel. And, with Thermo Fisher’s recent acquisition of Open Biosystems, the Initiative now offers even more value in the sharing of information on lentiviral libraries and high-content screening.”

Dr. Ralph Tripp, a researcher with the Department of Infectious Diseases at the **University of Georgia**, specializes in viral immunology. He will use the siRNA Library along with the Thermo Scientific Dharmacon miRIDIAN microRNA Mimics and Hairpin Inhibitors to evaluate host cell responses to influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

“RSV is a nasty bug and a leading cause of serious respiratory infection in young children,” said Dr. Tripp. “It can be dangerous for infants, the elderly or people with compromised immune systems, and despite 60 years of research, there is still no effective antiviral medicine or vaccine to fight it. Influenza is also a perennial problem for the elderly and the young. By learning how our cells respond to these viruses, we will be able to develop better treatments.” Dr. Tripp will attend the RNAi Global Initiative meeting in Dublin, Ireland, and looks forward to sharing research and learning about different approaches to RNAi screening. “On a broader level, by sharing research we may be able to find commonalities among host genes in other illnesses that may present an Achilles heel in some of these viruses.”

Dr. Taosheng Chen, who works in the Department of Chemical Biology and Therapeutics at **St. Jude**, directs the institution’s high-throughput screening center. This core facility will host the Dharmacon siRNA library and use it in collaboration with researchers across St. Jude in drug discovery efforts. St. Jude is internationally recognized for its pioneering work in treating children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases. Dr. Chen said RNA-interference will help researchers identify potential targets in disease pathways. For example, using gene-silencing techniques, they hope to find specific genes, which when knocked down, make a therapeutic chemical compound more effective — pointing to a potential target for drug development. In addition to cancer, St. Jude conducts research into infectious diseases and other serious pediatric illnesses.

“With so many leading member institutions, the RNAi Global Initiative will allow us to exchange ideas with other scientists in overlapping areas of discovery, which will help all of us to advance our work,” said Dr. Chen. “And, we bring something new to the group as perhaps the only institution focused on pediatric diseases.”

At the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**, the Small Molecule Screening Facility will host the siRNA library and make it available to the entire Madison campus, which has five biology-related colleges and more than 800 faculty members working in the biosciences.

“The siRNA library will be used to define basic molecular mechanisms important for the normal function of human cells and to identify potential therapeutic targets in human disease,” said F. Michael Hoffmann, professor and chairman of the university’s Department of Oncology and faculty supervisor at the Small Molecule Screening Facility at the School of Medicine and Public Health. Prof. Hoffmann said he expects that siRNA studies will span research into cancer, infectious disease, cardiovascular disease, neurodegenerative disease and metabolic diseases such as diabetes. The siRNA library may also be used in stem cell research, given the number of scientists at the university who are working in that field. “The goal is to expand our knowledge and understanding of human biology and to advance the understanding and treatment of disease, making discoveries that might be translated into clinical practice to improve human health.”

The University of Wisconsin-Madison’s acquisition of the siRNA library is funded in partnership with the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, the private nonprofit patenting and licensing organization for the university, through its Lead Discovery Initiative, which promotes the development of high value intellectual property through technology enhancement.

The RNAi Global Initiative holds two international gatherings each year. Members also communicate through monthly teleconferences, on-line Web forums and meetings of sub-groups focused on topics of special interest. Visit www.rnaglobal.org for more details.

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