

THE WISTAR INSTITUTE AND UNIVERSITY OF THE SCIENCES ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP TO SPEED TRANSLATIONAL DRUG RESEARCH

PHILADELPHIA -- (December 16, 2008) -- The Wistar Institute and University of the Sciences in Philadelphia today announce their partnership in a new Center for Chemical Biology and Translational Medicine. Combining Wistar's strengths in basic biomedical research with University of the Sciences' expertise in medicinal chemistry and pharmacology, the partnership will enable more rapid translation of basic science discoveries into compounds with potential for refinement into new medicines and therapies for patients.

The centerpiece of the partnership is a new \$1.1 million Molecular Screening Facility, unveiled today at The Wistar Institute. Using the facility's advanced screening technologies, scientists will be able to identify and characterize new molecules and compounds that hold the most promise for developing into therapeutic drugs for cancer and other diseases. Novel findings of small molecules and compounds will also spur further explorations in basic biomedical research -- the core of Wistar's mission.

"Wistar scientists are leaders in the discovery of excellent drug targets, but developing a useful drug from a promising lead compound can be a slow and daunting process," said Russel E. Kaufman, M.D., president and CEO of The Wistar Institute. "Collaborations through this Center would hasten the earliest stages of drug development by expediting very early phase research into pre-clinical trials, and ultimately to clinical trials in patients."

Wistar's Molecular Screening Facility houses state-of-the-art tools for testing "proof of concept" ideas and identifying molecules of interest for potential development into therapeutics. For example, Wistar researchers recently made the landmark discovery of the structure of telomerase, a protein involved in cancer growth. The next step would be to find molecules that bind to that protein and inhibit its oncogenic activity. Ultimately, such a "target" compound could be developed into a cancer drug.

This initial drug discovery phase relies not only on an understanding of cancer biology and identification of good drug targets, but also on the availability of large libraries of chemical compounds against which to test them. In Wistar's new screening facility, target proteins would be developed into high-throughput screening assays and tested against libraries of tens of thousands of potential molecules looking for so-called "hits" that inhibit function. The screening assays enable researchers to visualize and quantify this inhibitory effect at the molecular level, providing valuable data which would inform additional biological studies of the original targets, as well as potentially validate them as candidates for further pharmaceutical development.

Because what works in a test tube doesn't necessarily translate to a living organism, such a "hit" must then be chemically modified to ensure it will be able to perform its intended function in a living body. Collaborations between structural biologists and medicinal chemists and pharmacologists would address questions about the lead compound's pharmaceutical properties -- such as how it would be ingested, metabolized and excreted by the body -- with the goal of developing a drug candidate that is ready for pre-clinical testing in animal models and, ultimately with further refinement, clinical testing in humans.

"From computational chemistry to drug delivery, University of the Sciences' multi-disciplinary faculty and researchers are positioned to work collaboratively with Wistar's scientists," said Philip P. Gerbino, Pharm.D., president of University of the Sciences. "Our ability to assess the hits generated by the facility brings the process one step closer to identifying viable drug candidates that, at the end of the day, have the potential for improving healthcare for all people."

University of the Sciences in Philadelphia

At University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, students embark on a challenging learning experience in a proving ground for successful professionals in the healthcare-related fields. A private, coeducational institution dedicated to education, research, and service, and distinguished as the nation's first college of pharmacy, the University has produced leaders in the healthcare marketplace since its founding in 1821, including founders of six of the top pharmaceutical companies in the world. With undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree programs in such disciplines as pharmacy, bioinformatics, physical therapy, healthcare business, and health policy, the 3,000 students in the University of the Sciences' five colleges learn to excel in scientific analysis and to apply their skills to improving healthcare in their communities and in the lives of people worldwide.

The Wistar Institute

The Wistar Institute is an international leader in biomedical research with special expertise in cancer research and vaccine development. Founded in 1892 as the first independent nonprofit biomedical research institute in the country, Wistar has long held the prestigious Cancer Center designation from the National Cancer Institute. The Institute works actively to ensure that research advances move from the laboratory to the clinic as quickly as possible. The Wistar Institute: Today's Discoveries Tomorrow's Cures. On the Web at www.wistar.org.

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