

Media release, March 16, 2010

The Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research turns 40!

Today, the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research, part of the Novartis Research Foundation, is celebrating its 40th birthday. As it does so, it can look back on 40 years of excellence in basic biomedical research, 40 years of commitment to the training of young researchers and – not least – 40 years of successfully translating its findings into improved patient care. The FMI is in excellent shape for the future: never has its research been more successful – or more frequently published – than in recent years.

When the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research was founded by Ciba AG and J.R. Geigy AG at the start of the 1970s, it was designed to bridge the gap between high-level academic basic research and the pharmaceutical industry. Now, 40 years on, this interface function remains one of the Institute's key strengths. But the success of these efforts depends on the Institute itself maintaining a leading position in biomedical research worldwide.

Expertise in basic biomedical research

The reputation of the FMI was established early on by developments such as the Western blot technique, which is used to detect and identify proteins. From 1980 to 2003, attention was focused on plant genetics, and FMI researchers developed pioneering transgenic technologies in plants.

At the same time, the FMI focused increasingly on cancer research, and fundamental insights in this area have repeatedly been harnessed by Novartis for the benefit of patients. For example, the basic research conducted by the FMI on protein kinases led to the development of the cancer drug Gleevec®, launched by Novartis in 2003. Likewise, the results of the FMI's research on the protein mTOR in healthy and diseased tissue were decisive for the development of Afinitor®, a Novartis treatment for kidney cancer. Today, alongside cancer research, the FMI's international reputation also rests on its work in the fields of neurobiology and epigenetics. In recent years, FMI researchers have significantly enhanced our understanding of the development of anxiety states and of visual processes. The development of a novel approach for the treatment of retinitis pigmentosa for visually impaired adults is based upon these FMI results. In addition, the FMI develops state-of-the-art technologies for use in activities ranging from quantitative microscopy, through structural investigation of "molecular machines" within cells, to complex genome-wide analyses of gene expression.

More than 300 doctoral students trained

Over the past 40 years, more than 300 doctoral students have been trained at the FMI. Many of them subsequently took on leading roles in the pharmaceutical industry or in university research. FMI alumni are to be found in virtually every life sciences institution across Switzerland.

Today, the FMI employs around 320 people. Trainee researchers – doctoral students and postdocs from about 40 different countries – still account for more than half of the total. Susan Gasser, Director of the FMI, comments: "We have always provided young researchers with training; they have fewer preconceptions and are often very innovative and hard-working – three characteristics that are key to basic research and fundamental to our success."

A successful model

The present-day FMI is in excellent shape for the future: never has its research been more innovative and successful and more effectively translated into biomedical application for the benefit of patients than in the last few years. This has made it possible for the FMI to attract young research group leaders from internationally renowned centers such as Harvard, Yale,

Sandra Ziegler Handschin
Communications
Maulbeerstrasse 66
CH-4058 Basel

T +41 61 696 15 39
F +41 61 697 39 76

sandra.ziegler@fmi.ch
www.fmi.ch



Columbia and the Max Planck Institute. Judging by the Citation Index, which provides a measure of the impact of an institution's scientific publications, the FMI easily bears comparison with the larger Swiss universities or the ETH Zurich.

The bulk of the FMI's funding is still provided by the Novartis Research Foundation. This is supplemented by almost CHF 8 million a year in hard-won research funding from public institutions, e.g. in the EU, or from the Swiss National Science Foundation. The grants include five EU awards recognizing research excellence, for which Europe's leading researchers compete.

The idea of an institute operating at the interface between basic research and pharmaceutical development – though often decried as obsolete – is a successful model for high-quality basic biomedical research at the FMI. Paul Herrling, Head of the Novartis Institutes for Developing World Medical Research, says: "Industrial research can't cover all aspects of basic research. That's why it's extremely important to establish close relations between the pharmaceutical industry and academic research. The FMI serves as an interface and has done so highly successfully for the past 40 years."

FMI 40th Anniversary events

The FMI anniversary festivities start today with the event at Novartis entitled "From Basic Research to Pharmaceutical Breakthrough". In September, there will be a scientific conference for which numerous high-profile speakers from around the world have confirmed their participation. Also in September there will be an open house at the FMI for friends of the FMI, alums and the public in general.

Contact

Sandra Ziegler Handschin, +41 (0)61 696 15 39 or +41 (0)79 569 41 62, sandra.ziegler@fmi.ch

Press photos

Available for download at: www.fmi.ch

Photos may be used free of charge only in connection with reporting on this media release. Not to be archived. © FMI.

About the FMI

The Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research (FMI), based in Basel, Switzerland, is a world-class center for basic research in life sciences. It was founded in 1970 as a joint effort of two Basel-based pharmaceutical companies and is now part of the **Novartis Research Foundation**. The FMI is devoted to the pursuit of fundamental biomedical research. Areas of expertise are neurobiology, growth control, which includes signaling pathways, and the epigenetics of stem cell development and cell differentiation. The institute counts 320 collaborators. The FMI also offers training in biomedical research to PhD students and postdoctoral fellows from around the world. In addition the FMI is affiliated with the University of Basel. The Director of the FMI since 2004 is Prof. Susan Gasser. This year, the FMI is celebrating its 40th anniversary.