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Top neurophysiologist to lead SGC chemical biology effort

International public-private partnership appoints new Chief Scientist at Oxford laboratory.

GENOMICS The Structural Genomics Consortium (SGC) is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Chas Bountra to the position of Chief Scientist of its laboratory at the University of Oxford. Dr. Bountra will lead a team of 65 scientists at the SGC Oxford site and will oversee several new scientific initiatives including the Consortium's new chemical biology effort.

Dr. Bountra has worked in the pharmaceutical industry for twenty years, most recently as the Vice President of Biology at GlaxoSmithKline (UK) within the Neurology Center for Excellence in Drug Discovery. An electrophysiologist by training, he has played a major role in advancing more than 30 drug candidates into the clinic for disorders including post-operative pain, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, stroke, motor neuron disease and epilepsy.

Dr. Bountra was been involved in the launch of the first novel treatment for IBS, and his group was the first to show that neurokinin NK1 receptor antagonists are anti-emetic — a discovery that directly influenced drug development. During his

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tenure at GlaxoSmithKline, he held Visiting Professorships at both Imperial College (Neuroscience and Mental Health) and University of Oxford (Translational Medicine).

Dr. Bountra's extensive experience in managing complex scientific collaborations among different scientific disciplines will be invaluable to the SGC, as he will be called on to lead the Consortium's new effort in chemical biology. This initiative will exploit the SGC's expertise in the functional and structural biology of human proteins and apply the expertise to create chemical probes for use in target validation.

“One of the best ways to validate a drug target is by using a chemical probe of function,” explains Dr. Bountra. “And one of the best techniques to generate chemical

probes is to use protein and structure-based methods for which the SGC is renowned. Having purified more than 1,500 human protein structures of therapeutic relevance and determined the three-dimensional structures of more than 500 of them, the SGC is a world leader in this structure-based approach. My aim is to capitalise on this phenomenal resource and collaborate with chemists in the public and private sectors to create potent, selective and bio-available inhibitors for the SGC's proteins. Like our protein structures, the chemical probes generated by the SGC will be made freely-available for scientists in academia and industry.”

Dr. Bountra's appointment is welcomed by the SGC's Director, Dr. Aled Edwards. “We are thrilled to have someone of Dr. Bountra's experience come on board to lead our Oxford laboratory,” said Edwards. “Chas is special. He has overseen dozens of successful trans-disciplinary collaborations, and programmes that reach across disciplines — to biologists and chemists in both academia and industry — are exactly where the SGC's science is headed in the future.” ❖

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