



Research Institute of Molecular Pathology

Dr. Bohr-Gasse 7, 1030 Vienna, Austria
Tel: ++43-1-797 30/ext.
Fax: ++43-1-798 71-56
www.imp.univie.ac.at

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Barry Dickson appointed new Director of the Basic Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP) in Vienna

The Australian neurobiologist Barry Dickson is to head the Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP) in Vienna, a subsidiary of the Boehringer Ingelheim Group. He will succeed the British geneticist Kim Nasmyth who has accepted a call to Oxford University from the beginning of 2006.

In Dr. Barry Dickson, the IMP has been able to recruit a leading international neurobiologist as its Scientific Director. The decision was taken at the recommendation of an international scientific committee headed by the molecular biologist Piet Borst (Amsterdam). In his new position, Barry Dickson will succeed Kim Nasmyth, from the UK, who has successfully lead the institute since 1997. Nasmyth will leave Vienna in early 2006 to accept a post as director of one of Europe's largest biochemistry departments at Oxford.

Barry Dickson was born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1962. After taking a degree in mathematics, he turned to biology, receiving his doctorate in 1992 under Ernst Hafen at the University of Zurich. He then performed postdoctoral research at the University of California, Berkeley, before establishing his own research group in Zurich. In 1998, Dickson moved to Vienna where he was group leader at the IMP for five years. From there, Josef Penninger recruited him in 2003 to the new IMBA – Institute of Molecular Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences – where he currently holds the position of senior scientist.

Dr. Andreas Barner, Vice Chairman of the Board of Managing Directors of Boehringer Ingelheim, and responsible for the Corporate Board Division Pharmaceutical Research, Development and Medicine, believes that the choice of Barry Dickson represents a great opportunity for the IMP and the cooperation with IMBA. "I am delighted that Dr. Dickson has accepted the challenge. His scientific qualifications and communication skills stand him in excellent stead for his new position. The IMP gets a young, ambitious, and open-minded Scientific Director."

Barry Dickson and his team, which includes 14 different nationalities, are involved in numerous international research collaborations, including two projects funded by the European Union. Dickson himself acts as a scientific coordinator for the FLYSNP project. In 2003, he was elected member of the European Molecular Biology Organisation, EMBO, having received the "EMBO Young Investigator" award three years earlier.

The focus of Dickson's research is the developing nervous system, and how it is correctly "wired". His group used the fruit fly, *Drosophila*, to investigate how the fibres of nerve cells (axons) find their target cells during embryonic development. With his team, he has already identified a number of key molecules in the subtle guidance system, and determined how these molecules work. In 2000, his group succeeded in clarifying the functions of the so-called Robo receptors. The "Robo code", which his team identified, now features in standard textbooks for developmental biology. Two years ago, Dickson turned his attention to a new and ambitious project: to use the fruit fly's sexual behavior as a model to understand the genetic and neurobiological underpinnings of a complex innate behavior.



Contact:

Dr. Barry Dickson
+43 1 79730-455
dickson@imp.univie.ac.at

Dr. Heidemarie Hurlt (IMP Pressereferat)
+43 1 79730-358
mobil: +43 664 8247910
hurlt@imp.univie.ac.at

Links:

<http://www.imp.univie.ac.at>
<http://www.imba.oeaw.ac.at>
<http://www.boehringer-ingelheim.com>

IMP Press Release

Another ongoing project is the construction of a set of about 15,000 transgenic fly strains, each of which allows the targeted disruption of a single gene. As about 70% of the fly's genes have a counterpart in humans, they can be used to survey gene function in models of human disease. This project is conducted in the framework of a newly-founded Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Functional Genomics, which was founded by IMBA and will be housed in the new IMBA building.

The IMP has entered into a close alliance with IMBA, which includes all scientific and administrative infrastructure. The two institutes, together known as the "IMP-IMBA Research Center" will continue to pool their resources. Both parties welcome the fact that the new IMP director is equally familiar with both institutes. Barry Dickson himself sees this as a major advantage: "It is a great honour and challenge for me to take over the leadership of the renowned IMP, and to help shape its future. I particularly value the close and productive cooperation with IMBA. The Academy of Sciences took a bold and visionary step in establishing this new institute, and found an ideal partner in the IMP."

IMP

The Viennese Research Institute of Molecular Pathology GmbH (IMP), established in 1985, belongs to the global Boehringer Ingelheim Group. Since 1998, the IMP has formed the core of the present Vienna Biocenter Campus. With over 200 employees from 28 countries, the Institute investigates the molecular processes in the development of organisms and the origin of disease. The results often enable the development of new drugs at Boehringer Ingelheim.

The establishment of the IMBA dates back to an agreement between Boehringer Ingelheim and the Austrian Academy of Science in 1999. The IMBA broadens the research capacity at the Vienna Biocenter Campus considerably, bridging the gap between the pure basic research at the IMP and the specific application of results in medicine.

Boehringer Ingelheim

The Boehringer Ingelheim Group ranks among the top 20 pharmaceutical companies in the world. Headquartered in Ingelheim, Germany, Boehringer Ingelheim has 152 affiliated companies worldwide in 45 different countries with a total of over 34,000 employees. The company, founded in 1885 and still owned by the family, focuses on the research, development, manufacture and marketing of new products offering significant therapeutic benefit in human medicine and animal health.

In 2003, Boehringer Ingelheim posted net sales of 7.4 billion euro. More than one fifth of income from the Prescription Medicines sector was invested in the research and development of new drugs.

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