



Pan-Asian Network for Neglected Diseases (PAN4ND)



Shanghai Institute of Materia Medica – 4th-6th June 2007

Experts across Asia make critical progress in building regional platform for natural substances to treat neglected diseases

Shanghai, 6th June 2007 – Scientific experts from countries across the Asia-Pacific region are being hosted this week by the Shanghai Institute of Materia Medica (SIMM) and the Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi). Natural substances' researchers from 8 countries across the region will discuss details on how to stimulate natural substances R&D to develop drugs for neglected diseases through the Pan-Asian Network for Drugs for Neglected Diseases from Natural Substances (PAN4ND).

Initiated last year, this regional platform aims at encouraging research collaboration between national institutes to maximize the potential for discovery of new molecules from natural origin for development as drugs for neglected diseases. SIMM with DNDi is co-hosting the Network's second meeting and also a natural substances drug discovery and development working group and a seminar. An important and the major part of the meeting will be dedicated to the annual meeting of the Pan-Asian screening network for Drugs for Neglected Diseases from Natural Substances (PASN) that aims to encourage and harmonize collaborative research related to drug screening against pathogens responsible for neglected diseases. This network is financially supported by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (Japan).

"This international meeting of the best regional scientific minds serves to accelerate the collaboration of Asian researchers in the critical search to develop natural substances as new drugs to fight neglected diseases," remarked Professor Kaixian Chen, Chancellor, Shanghai Institutes for Biological Sciences, Chinese Academy of Science. "China is proud to be a member of this regional partnership and to support the network through its expertise in natural product chemistry, so that we can share information and expertise with fellow scientists from Asia and the rest of the world."

New drugs and diagnostics are desperately needed: although neglected tropical diseases and tuberculosis account for 12% of the global disease burden, only 1.3% (21 out of 1,556) of new drugs were developed for these diseases over the past 30 years.¹ With limited capacity for R&D in developing countries, a serious lack of research for innovative medicines for this population has occurred. A critical source for innovative medicines can be found in nature: historically, over half of all new drugs (registered as new chemical entities) have been derived from or inspired by natural products.²

"The most effective treatments for malaria and filariasis are both natural products identified by laboratories in Asia. Artemisinin derivatives and ivermectin serve as excellent examples as this platform works to identify new bioactive molecules as potential treatments for other neglected diseases," said Simon Croft, R&D Director of DNDi. "DNDi recognizes that it is essential that we work closely with scientific experts from endemic countries so that we are able to meet our aim of developing new, field-adapted treatments that meet the specific needs of neglected patients."

The Pan-Asian Network for Drugs for Neglected Diseases from Natural Substances (PAN4ND) will convene to discuss current R&D to identify new bioactive molecules from natural substances and how best to use standardized methodologies to generate and manage data that could be employed to prepare an Investigational New Drug Application (IND) for deadly diseases like visceral leishmaniasis, also known as kala-azar, and human African trypanosomiasis, or sleeping sickness.

Professor Ye of SIMM, elaborated upon the critical role played by members of PAN4ND: "Developing countries have the ability to provide new solutions for neglected diseases, but every day they face an uphill battle to find home-grown capacity for research and development into diseases that affect our poor. Of 30,000 known human diseases, there are treatments for just 10,000. Working together in regional, needs-driven research platform such as PAN4ND, is one of the paths we are taking to address this lack of capacity."

For further information, or to arrange interviews with SIMM, Dr Simon Croft, or other meeting participants, please contact Prof Yang Ye on +86 21 50806726 or yeye@mail.shcnc.ac.cn or Ann-Marie Sevcsik on +41 (0)79 814 9147 or amsevcsik@dndi.org. To learn more about the meeting, please visit www.pan4nd.org

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The **Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi)** is an independent, not-for-profit drug development initiative established in 2003 by five publicly-funded research organisations – Malaysian Ministry of Health, Kenya Medical Research Institute, Indian Council of Medical Research, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation Brazil, and the Institut Pasteur – as well as an international humanitarian organisation, Médecins Sans Frontières. The UNICEF/UNDP/World Bank/WHO's Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) is a permanent observer.

With a current portfolio of 22 projects, DNDi aims to develop new, improved, and field-relevant drugs for neglected diseases, such as malaria, leishmaniasis, human African trypanosomiasis, and Chagas disease that afflict the very poor in developing countries. DNDi also raises awareness about the need for greater R&D for neglected diseases and strengthens existing research capacity in disease-endemic countries. For further information, please consult www.dndi.org.

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The **Shanghai Institute of Materia Medica (SIMM)**, Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) evolved from the Institute of Materia Medica of Peking Academy of Sciences founded in 1932. SIMM's mission is to provide a comprehensive solution in drug discovery and development. By combining basic and applied research efforts and through cross-fostering between chemistry and biology, scientists at SIMM carry out studies toward the elucidation of the structural basis of bioactive substances, discovery of new targets or mechanisms of action, comprehensive pre-clinical evaluation of drug candidates, and promotion of commercialization, thereby playing an indispensable role in building China's drug innovation capabilities.

For more information, please consult www.simm.ac.cn.

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The **Pan-Asian Screening Network for Drugs for Neglected Diseases from Natural Substances (PASN)** currently involves collaborating centers in 6 countries: Kitasato Institute, Japan; Central Drug Research Institute, India; Shanghai Institute of Materia Medica, China; Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) and Malaysian Institute for Pharmaceuticals and Nutraceuticals, Malaysia; Institut Pasteur, Korea; Novartis Institute of Tropical Diseases, Singapore. The objective of PASN is to create a climate suitable for collaborative research on identification of novel molecules that could be used as for neglected diseases and to provide the partner institutions with information regarding neglected diseases' research, natural products, and biological screening. For more information, please consult www.pan4nd.org.

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References:

1. Chirac P, Torreele E. *Lancet*. 2006 May 12; 367: 1560-1561.
2. Newman, D.J. et al. *Journal of Natural Products*. 2003; 66: 1022-1037.