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New Technologies Speed Up Drug Discovery

By Bernard Dichek

There's a new gold rush in the drug industry, reminiscent of the early days of genetic engineering when drug giants snapped up fledgling biotechnology companies for hundreds of millions of dollars. Only this time the large drug companies are targeting biopharmaceutical companies with new technologies that speed up drug discovery. In the past year Glaxo paid \$538 million for Affymax, Eli Lilly bought Sphinx Pharmaceuticals for \$72 million and Marion Merrell Dow Inc. acquired Selectide Corp. for \$58 million.

What these fast-rising companies have in common are computer-aided technologies to spot molecules that alleviate or cure illnesses. Using recent advances in computer modelling and magnetic resonance imaging, drug developers can now rapidly screen large numbers of protein fragments known as peptides until they find one with potential to be a drug.

Although peptide drugs are still in their infancy, they already are generating worldwide sales of more than \$3 billion a year. Peptor is a young Israel-based company that has invented several peptide-related technologies. In a recent interview, Peptor's President Dr. Yoram Karmon, explained how these technologies are changing the way in which new drugs are discovered.

"The new technologies eliminate the need for time-consuming research with large protein structures. Drugs based on massive protein molecules also have the disadvantage of binding with body receptors other than the ones involved in a specific disease," says Karmon. "By zeroing in on peptides, which are the small active sites of proteins that do the real work, drug developers can come up with purer products that don't cause undesirable side effects."

Companies like Peptor test variations of peptides until they find one that binds with a body receptor linked to a disease. "If the match is

Volunteers of the Month Library Volunteers

Hats Off To The Library Volunteers

By Amalia Warshenbrot, - Librarian Speizman Jewish Library

During November many Jewish communities celebrate Jewish Book Month with special programs and book fairs. How fitting it is to choose this month to honor all of the Speizman Jewish Library volunteers! Without these dedicated people, the library would not be able to offer its services to the community at large:

Leon and Flora Benveniste have been volunteering at the library since it opened. They wrap and put pockets into books and repair damaged books.

The following hard working volunteers type book cards, newspaper articles and correspondence:

- Mae Goldman
- Helene Howard
- Naomi Myles
- Ruth Richardson
- Wanda Schwartz
- Sylvia Wallach.

If the names of any library volunteers have been omitted, I apologize. All the library patrons - children and adults - salute these dedicated volunteers. I couldn't manage the library without them. Next time you visit the Speizman Jewish Library, remember the many volunteers "hidden behind the books."

These volunteers are literally the "driving force" behind other volunteers, because they drive other volunteers who are unable to drive:

- Eileen Darholt
- Julius Goldman
- Ruth Richardson
- Stanley Tulman.

The following people help with the Book and Author Program, sponsored by Hadassah, the Jewish Community Center and the Speizman Jewish Library:

- Roz Cooper
- Rosalind Taranto
- Lynda White

The Book Fair runs smoothly thanks to the following volunteers;

- Eli Hyman
- Henry Hirschmann
- Dr. Jay Jacoby
- Maddie Joffe
- Bobbie Pollard
- Ruth Richardson

a good one, the peptide drug will thwart the disease, says Karmon.

Current peptide drugs however, are not without drawbacks. Because peptides have a dynamic, constantly-changing shape, they often are unstable as drugs and require large dosages.

Peptor's latest discovery, which caused excitement when it was demonstrated at a recent meeting of the European Peptide Society in Belgium, may have solved this problem. "We have found a way to give peptides a rigid structure. This allows them to stay anchored into cell receptors for a long enough period of time to be effective," says Karmon.

Because of the multi-disciplinary nature of peptide research, Peptor is utilizing experts at leading research institutes from California's Salk Institute, Germany's Munich

University and Israel's Hebrew University.

Peptor currently is concentrating its efforts in finding peptide drugs for treating gastrointestinal diseases and fungal infections. Future plans include applying its proprietary technologies to create drugs for multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's disease and various cancers.

The company already is collaborating with the U.S.-based Xoma Corp. in the development of its anti-fungal peptide and expects soon to start a joint venture with an European company to develop peptides for lymphatic cancer and leukemia.

"The new high-tech approach to drug discovery has the promise of bringing drugs to market faster than ever before," concludes Karmon. Peptor expects to have its first drugs ready for clinical trials in Europe as early as the end of next year.



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