University of Minnesota, Mayo Clinic sign research pact with Karolinska

EurekAlert

ROCHESTER/MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. -- The University of Minnesota and Mayo Clinic, under the mantle of the Minnesota Partnership for Biotechnology and Medical Genomics, have formed a strategic research relationship with the Karolinska Institute of Stockholm, Sweden, the top-rated medical research university in Europe. Leaders of each institution signed memoranda of understanding to commit to the formal ongoing collaboration, called the Frontiers of Biomedical Research.

"This is a timely expansion of the Minnesota Partnership with our colleagues at the Karolinska Institute," says Frank Cerra, M.D., senior vice president for Health Sciences and dean of the University of Minnesota Medical School. "Biomedical knowledge is expanding so fast that we need solid partnerships to leverage our discoveries."

The goal of the Frontiers in Biomedical Research is to accelerate and build on the existing relationships among the three organizations. Initial plans include establishing fellowships for promising young investigators to support exchanges in targeted research areas. This goal is predicated on the reality that young investigators receiving this kind of training experience will become future global leaders in biomedical research.

"This extremely valuable relationship built on our existing foundations for discovery means that our findings will have much more of an immediate and global impact for patients," says Robert Rizza, M.D., Mayo Clinic's executive dean for research. "Strong partnerships make us more efficient and productive, while fostering some of the best scientific minds in the world."

Initially, research collaborations will focus on emerging areas of biomedical science that will address current health issues:

- Regenerative Medicine -- A field that holds promise for regenerating damaged cells within the body and/or creating replacements in the laboratory. It is a revolutionary approach that focuses on curing conditions as opposed to treating them, and encompasses chronic diseases, such as heart disease and cancer, and degenerative diseases of the nervous and musculoskeletal systems.
- Bio-Omics -- A phrase that includes several of the most promising fields of biomedical research, including genomics, proteomics, and metabolomics, all of which are strengths of the partnering institutions.
- Immunity -- Relates to development of new or improved vaccines and therapeutic agents active against infectious agents that already devastate

or threaten to devastate large numbers of people living in the developing world, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.

The three-way agreement was celebrated during a recent visit to Minnesota by Harriett Wallberg-Henriksson, M.D., Ph.D., president of the Karolinska Institute. She received an honorary degree from the University of Minnesota. The degree was conferred by University Regent Patricia Simmons, M.D., who was assisted by University President Robert Bruininks, Ph.D., and Mayo Clinic president and CEO, John Noseworthy, M.D.

Background

The Karolinska Institute -- founded 200 years ago this year -- recommends the laureates for the Nobel Prize in Medicine or Physiology. Perhaps due to the state's Scandinavian heritage, Minnesota's research universities have more than 30 years of relationships, partnerships, exchanges, and joint projects with Karolinska that have resulted in joint publications, research grants, and discoveries that are aimed at improving the health of people worldwide.

Renowned researchers from Karolinska have worked in the Minnesota labs of Robert Elde, Ph.D.; Alfred Michael, M.D.; and Gregory Vercellotti, M.D., while University and Mayo scientists, such as Peter Bitterman, M.D.; and Sree Nair, M.D., Ph.D., to name several, have benefited from research opportunities and time in Stockholm. Karolinska awarded an honorary degree to Dr. Nair in 2008.

Next Steps

Dedicated funding has been established to support a few of the best young investigators at the postdoctoral levels who would be selected as recipients of Frontiers Awards. Those awards would provide support for one year of research in the laboratory of a senior investigator with an active collaboration at the recipient's institution.

To ensure engagement with all partners, collaborations will be established among senior investigators from respective laboratories at the University of Minnesota, the Karolinska Institute and Mayo Clinic. Additionally, this new program would support an annual Frontiers Research Conference/Symposium involving participants from all three institutions.

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