



Jerusalem, January 2013

Interactive Portal: Israel Institute of Molecular Medicine (IIMM)

Dear colleagues

In Israel, unlike the rest of the world almost all research in the field of molecular medicine is conducted within universities and the Weizmann Institute of Science. No governmental institutes (NIH-like, CNRS-like) no private institutes (such as the Max Planck institute, the Salk Institute, Scripps, Dana-Farber, Sloan-Kettering, etc.) exist. Israel even lacks private or governmental foundations to support research in specific areas (i.e., cancer, allergy, muscular dystrophy) or general aspects of 'Molecular Medicine'. Many such institutes and foundations exist in the developed world.

Even when taking a wider view, we found that research of only 389 research groups in Israel could be considered as research in the field of 'Molecular Medicine'. These groups are working in different areas: biology, chemistry, medicine, computer science and physics. As a result, communication between groups is weak, hindering synergism and collaborations. We also found that within the field there is an uneven distribution of sub-fields. The activity in some universities is dramatically biased towards certain disciplines, whereas almost no activity exists in other fields. This results from the lack of academic policy or a set of coincidences.

Mapping the activity in molecular medicine in Israel

A committee chaired by David Engelberg of the Hebrew University with the active participation of: Atan Gross (The Weizmann Institute of Science), Zeev Paroush (The Hebrew University), Ehud Gazit (Tel Aviv University) and Dan Tawfik (The Weizmann Institute) mapped a significant fraction of the groups in Israel, which conduct research in molecular medicine. We included under the umbrella of 'Molecular Medicine' investigators whose goal is to understand the molecular basis of disease-related biological phenomena. Notably, this definition includes those whose research is basic in nature as well as disease oriented. We ruled out investigators doing clinical (not molecular) science, plant biologists, biotechnologists and some microbiologists (who work on bacteria that are obviously not relevant). We included bioinformaticists, modelists and most of those involved in pharmaceutical research and synthesis of potential drugs. During the course of mapping we encountered groups that are distantly related to 'Molecular Medicine'.



These groups appear in the mapping results under the column 'mild involvement in Molecular Medicine'.

As we did not confine ourselves to any particular technical or systematic disciplines, the relevant scientists are working at many different departments within a university. This necessitated a detailed examination of each individual group. Namely, looking into the scientific activity of each investigator in the natural science faculties of our universities. We relied heavily on publicly available information, via homepages of research groups and in many instances, recent publications.

The data was collected in 2007 and needs to be updated and expanded to institutes and hospitals that have not been included yet. The delay in moving ahead resulted from financial constraints and the inability of certain institutions to take the task upon themselves. Due to the importance of the issue for all of us as individuals and for the state of Israel I have decided to take it upon myself. It is now up to all of you to update the portal and start using it.

The mission of the portal

To establish virtual institute of molecular medicine, such that all research groups can interact with each other over the internet. The portal will display all important events such as meetings, lectures, advanced schools and workshops in the various disciplines of molecular medicine. The portal will allow registered researchers to easily communicate with each other. For example, one would be able to identify researchers according to a specific scientific question as well as specific research reagents or research protocol, needed for a specific research.

What next? Take action!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'A. Levitzki'.

Alexander Levitzki