

A Yissum Conference Sponsored by Leading Pharmaceutical Companies Johnson & Johnson and Merck

The transfer of Academic Research to the Pharmaceutical Industry – The Industrial Perspective

Yissum, the technology transfer company of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, hosted senior representatives from leading pharmaceutical companies such as Johnson & Johnson and Merck at a conference held on June 4th at The Belgium House (Beit Belgia). The conference took place during the Biomed week in Israel.

The conference, which was an initiative of Yissum, was held for the first time this year. Its primary focus was the industrial perspective on the transfer of academic research to the pharmaceutical industry.

The conference was sponsored by Johnson & Johnson and Merck, two of the five largest pharmaceutical companies in the world. Each is listed on the New York Stock Exchange at a market value of over 1 billion Dollars.

Dr. Jacques Bollekens, Senior Director of Translational Medical Research at Tibotec (a Johnson & Johnson company), who headed the drug development process of one of the leading HIV drugs, came to Israel specifically to take part in the conference. He gave an extensive and informative lecture on the state of the development of HIV drugs. There are already a growing number of collaborations between Yissum and Tibotec, and discussions are being held on ways to further expand and strengthen these collaborations.

Representing Merck were Dr. Berta Strulovici, VP Drug Discovery, Automated Biotech, and Dr. Margaret Beer, Director, Scientific Liaison, Licensing and External Research, Europe, who is in charge, amongst other things, of locating technologies in companies and universities. Dr. Strulovici presented Merck's approach to shorten and ameliorate the drug development process through research tools. In her overview she emphasized the complexity of such processes and elaborated on Merck's areas of interest. During Merck's visit at Yissum a number of new research-tool technologies developed by university researchers were presented.

Among the speakers was Dr. John S. Patton, Founder and CSO of Nektar, who spoke about the industrial aspects of the development of drug delivery technologies. This is especially important since there is a strong group of researches at Hebrew University who specialize in this field.

The participants in the conference included researchers from the Departments of Medicine, Life Sciences, and Agriculture. Prof. Yechezkel Barenholz, inventor of the Doxil drug, sold today by Johnson & Johnson and Schering Plough, at approximately four hundred million dollars, noted that the conference enhanced the participants

understanding of the complexities involved in the drug development process of medical products, and of the industry on a whole.

At the conclusion of the conference the panel of speakers from the companies and Yissum discussed the ways and appropriate stages at which the projects should be presented to companies.

Nava Swersky Sofer, CEO and President of Yissum, added: “In light of the success of this years conference and the positive responses of the researchers, Yissum intends to hold a follow-up conference next year.”