GenomeWeb Daily New
The GenomeWeb Intelligence Network

Yissum Announces Hebrew University Genetic Resource

March 11, 2008
By Andrea Anderson,
a GenomeWeb staff reporter

NEW YORK (GenomeWeb News) – The Hebrew University of Jerusalem is launching a new DNA-disease database and genotyping service, the university's technology transfer company Yissum said today.

The Hebrew University Genetic Resource, or HUGR, is a case-control DNA database for genetic association studies of common diseases. The idea is that researchers can select samples through the HUGR web site, order genotyping for their SNPs of interest, and then receive the data within about six weeks. At the moment, HUGR houses 15,000 DNA samples derived from blood samples drawn from Ashkenazi Jews living in Israel.

"The basis is to have a DNA resource where genetic associations can be tested," Ariel Darvasi, a geneticist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who helped spearhead HUGR, told *GenomeWeb Daily News*.

The database contains samples representing 16 different diseases, including type I and II diabetes, various cancers, neurological and psychiatric diseases, hypertension, and asthma. The samples are also linked to a wide variety of additional information on everything from phenotype to family history to available treatments and efficacy. The database contains between 500 and 1,200 samples for each disease and a common control set containing DNA from 5,000 self-declared healthy controls.

"That's why it's called HUGR," Darvasi joked, "because it's huge."

The HUGR staff plans to use Kbioscience genotyping for all the samples. Darvasi noted that the HUGR service itself is not intended to provide genome-wide association data — that's something researchers there will continue doing with collaborators — but it is intended to help researchers get data on individuals' SNPs. "This is kind of the next step [after genome-wide association studies]," he said.

There are no limits placed on access to the samples, Darvasi said, other than that they must be used for a valid scientific investigation, since donors provided blood samples under strict ethical guidelines and signed informed consent waivers stating that the samples were going to be used for genetic research.

The samples are available to any research group based on a per-genotyping charge, with no publication royalties. At the moment, the prices listed on the HUGR web site are about $1,350 to set up a project, $135 to attempt a SNP assay, and $60 to attempt rack genotyping, though there are discounts for those ordering ten or more SNPs.

Setting up the new service cost an estimated $10 million and took two to three years, Davasi said. The samples were initially collected from Israeli blood banks as part of research studies at the Hebrew University. For instance, the data was used to determine gene variants influencing schizophrenia risk. That work appeared in this February's issue of *PLoS Genetics*. The samples were also used in other studies including one on type II diabetes published last August in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*.
"This resource grew out of something very large that we thought we should share," Darvasi said, emphasizing that the samples have already produced publishable results. While it's too early to gauge the response of the scientific community, Darvasi said he's gotten encouraging feedback from colleagues at scientific meetings who are interested in seeing the resource made available.

Information about HUGR is available here.