Pfizer and UCSF Form Alliance to Advance a Broad Range of Research

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(BUSINESS WIRE)--In a novel experiment to advance new drug discovery and development, as well as stimulate basic research, Pfizer, Inc. and UCSF have launched a collaboration that spans many disciplines, several UC campuses and multiple Pfizer research units.

The three year agreement, with research and other support up to $9.5 million, establishes a university team to help identify promising areas of mutual interest and facilitate project management. The innovative effort already has templates in place to allow swift industry-university agreements.

The Pfizer-UCSF agreement will encourage collaborations between the company and UCSF's unit of QB3, the multi-campus California Institute for Quantitative Biosciences, headquartered at UCSF. The effort will be managed by QB3. All interested UCSF scientists will be eligible to participate, as will scientists at QB3's two sister university campuses – UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz.

The collaboration was announced today.

Corey Goodman, Ph.D., president of Pfizer's Biotherapeutics and Bioinnovation Center (BBC), will lead the collaboration for the company. The BBC, a newly-formed division of Pfizer, is a small, entrepreneurial business unit created to build the technology platforms expected to deliver a steady pipeline of biotherapeutics and to stimulate such grassroots collaborations. Goodman, a member of the National Academy of Sciences, is a former biotechnology company executive and a University of California research professor.

At QB3, Daniel Santi, Ph.D., UCSF professor of pharmaceutical chemistry and co-founder and former CEO of the biotech company Kosan, will manage the collaboration. QB3 involves 180 university scientists at the three UC campuses, collaborating on research with each other and, increasingly, with biotech and pharmaceutical companies. Its goals are to speed the translation of basic research discoveries into diagnostics, drugs and other treatments.

"The need to find better ways to bridge the gap between biomedical research and drug discovery could not be more acute," Pfizer's Goodman said. "The great discoveries from basic research must be better translated to develop new medicines for unmet medical needs."

"This new approach captures the best of both biotech and pharmaceutical worlds – and it benefits everyone: Pfizer, the university, patients and public health."

"This alliance speaks to the core goals of QB3," said Reg Kelly, Ph.D., director of QB3 and a principal architect of the novel plan. "The institute was created by the state of California to spur research needed to advance health and expand the state's economy. The new collaboration intimately links the scientific talent of UCSF with the extraordinary expertise of a pharmaceutical company like Pfizer."

"This can be a boon to the company and to the university, but also to the taxpayers who hope their support for basic research can lead to better health."

QB3's Santi will head up a UCSF team to identify promising collaborative projects and help facilitate projects, which he expects will greatly increase the probability of project success.

In traditional industry/academia collaborations, pharmaceutical companies engage university researchers by looking for a specific line of research that can aid their on-going projects, and the research is conducted solely by the university scientist, Santi explains. The new venture assembles teams of Pfizer and university scientists to work on projects, in health-related areas of mutual interest.

Recently, Pfizer and some other major pharmaceutical companies have created small, entrepreneurial arrangements with universities, but these generally focus on single promising fields, such as immunology. In one planned project, UCSF and Pfizer scientists will perform collaborative research that enables innovative computational and structure-based approaches to develop monoclonal antibody-based therapeutics for important disease targets.

Discussions on the collaboration began in late November, and moved swiftly. By the time of the signing of the agreement last week, three Pfizer-UCSF collaborative projects were ready to begin, Goodman said.

“This is definitely an exciting opportunity,” he said. “This collaboration allows our scientists to interact in a grassroots way to advance basic scientific findings that have potential biomedical application. I am confident that this will provide tremendous benefit for Pfizer, for UCSF and for the health of society.”

UCSF is a leading university dedicated to promoting health worldwide through advanced biomedical research, graduate-level education in the life sciences and health professions, and excellence in patient care.

Pfizer Inc. is the world's largest research-based biomedical and pharmaceutical company, employing approximately 87,000 colleagues in more than 150 countries. In 2007, Pfizer invested $8.1 billion in research and development. The Pfizer Biotherapeutics and Bioinnovation Center is based in the San Francisco Bay Area and combines cutting-edge biology, new platform technologies, and advanced research tools to discover and develop new medicines. Located in one of the hubs of biotechnology, the BBC has the entrepreneurial spirit of biotech and will collaborate broadly with the academic, biotech, and venture communities to focus on discovering and developing new medicines.

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