

Lion CEO steps down

Bioinformatics company Lion Bioscience (Heidelberg, Germany) announced on December 15, 2003, the resignation of its CEO and founder Friedrich von Bohlen. The move is the latest in a series of setbacks for the company. Lion Bioscience began in 1997 as a spin-off from the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (Heidelberg, Germany), initially combining genome analysis, information and data management, as well as the study of protein structure and function predictions. Von Bohlen adopted a dual business strategy that combined pharmaceutical research with information technology. But in 2002, when the German biotech boom ended (*Nat. Biotechnol.* 20, 531, 2002), the company closed down its drug-discovery business and decided to focus on developing integrated software solutions, which had trouble meeting market demands because of the complexity needed in the software. "Customers said, we are not going to pay you €2 million for a complete solution that contains sixteen programs if we actually only need a quarter of those," says analyst Rüdiger Weseloh of Sal. Oppenheim (Cologne, Germany). "Now they need to restructure again.

Genomics center opens in Argentina



The Regional Center for Genomic Studies (CREG; La Plata, Argentina), opened its door in January to its first research group working on protein biophysics and proteomics. In February, a second team studying the insect genomes of such vectors as the Chagas disease carrier *Triatoma infestans* will take up residence. "A Latin American country cannot hope to compete with the Sanger Center or some of these colossal human genome centers," explains CREG's director Rolando Rivera Pomar. "So we looked at areas where this region would have a comparative advantage, and one of these is the study of infectious disease vectors. In Europe or the US they are exotic species, difficult to handle and subject to stringent regulation; here they're just flying around waiting to be collected *in situ*." CREG aims to develop technological platforms made freely available to researchers from the Montevideo Group of Associated Universities, which encompasses 17 institutions from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. "CREG will serve to benefit different countries in the way [the European Molecular Biology Laboratory] does in Europe," says Rivera Pomar. CREG received funding from the local government, the Max Planck Society (Munich, Germany) and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Bonn, Germany). CO

von Bohlen might have said, okay, we've got to try a third strategy, but this time someone else should do it," he adds. However, to find the best strategy for future development, the

company needs leadership with sound information technology expertise. Von Bohlen is expected to join the company's board in August. MH

Selected research collaborations

Company 1	Company 2	\$(millions)	Details
NeuroSearch A/S (Ballerup, Denmark)	GlaxoSmithKline (London)	103.5	In a 5-year agreement to develop treatments for the central nervous system, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) will have access to NeuroSearch drug candidates including triple monoamine reuptake inhibitor NS2359 for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, currently in phase 2 trials. NeuroSearch will receive a total \$103.5 million in guaranteed payments, including \$36.7 million in up-front and research payments and a \$22.3 million equity investment by GSK.
Lexicon Genetics (The Woodlands, TX, USA)	Bristol-Myers Squibb (Princeton, NJ, USA)	66	A partnership to carry out the preclinical development of small molecules against targets supplied by Lexicon to treat depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, pain and Alzheimer disease. Lexicon will contribute their 13 drug discovery programs and future discoveries from its gene knockout program in return for an up-front payment of \$36 million and at least \$30 million in research funding for 3 years. Lexicon will receive up to an additional \$50 million if Bristol-Myers Squibb extends the discovery portion of the pact for 2 years.
Cenix BioScience (Dresden, Germany)	Bayer Healthcare (Leverkusen, Germany)	*	A deal to identify and validate new drug targets for several diseases by using Cenix' genome-wide short interfering RNA library to screen druggable genes, relying on cell-based assays codeveloped by both partners. Bayer will retain the rights to new intellectual property; Cenix will receive up-front payments and milestones.
Morphochem AG (Munich, Germany)	Novartis AG (Basel, Switzerland)	*	A venture to use Morphochem's combined chemistry, in-silico biology and informatics drug discovery technology to discover and optimize new anti-infectives compounds with activity against targets supplied by Novartis. Novartis will fund the research at Morphochem, which is entitled to milestones. Further financial details were undisclosed.
Structural GenomiX (San Diego, CA, USA)	UroGene (Paris)	*	An effort to discover and develop small molecule inhibitors against novel urological cancer kinase targets. UroGene will validate targets brought by Structural GenomiX which will provide its high-throughput protein structure determination and lead discovery technology. Exclusive commercialization rights will go to Structural GenomiX in North America and to UroGene, in Europe.

*Financial details not disclosed.

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