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For immediate release

IMEx consortium provides new mechanism for improving access to molecular interaction data

Hinxton, August 29, 2005 – The executive teams of five major molecular interaction databases announced today the signing of an agreement to share curation efforts and exchange completed records through a mechanism known as the International Molecular Exchange (IMEx) consortium. IMEx will provide a network of stable, synchronized and freely accessible databases, and will serve as a way to jointly capture all published molecular interaction data in a manner similar to the successful global collaborations for protein and DNA sequences and for macromolecular structures.

“In deciding to map the biomolecular interactions that define life itself, one quickly realizes how daunting a task we have set for ourselves,” says Henning Hermjakob, principal investigator of the IntAct molecular interactions database at EMBL’s European Bioinformatics Institute. “All along, however, we saw this project as a collaborative task between our own group and the global scientific community. Thus, it made perfect sense to combine our efforts with those of our colleagues working at other centres.”

Participating databases as of August 2005 are:

- BIND (www.blueprint.org) The Blueprint Initiative Asia Pte. Ltd, Singapore and The Blueprint Initiative North America, Toronto Canada;
- DIP (<http://dip.doe-mbi.ucla.edu/>), UCLA-DOE Institute for Genomics & Proteomics, Los Angeles, USA;
- IntAct (www.ebi.ac.uk/intact), EMBL–European Bioinformatics Institute, Hinxton, UK;
- MINT (<http://mint.bio.uniroma2.it/mint/>) University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, Rome Italy; and
- MPact (<http://mips.gsf.de/genre/proj/mpact>), MIPS / Institute for Bioinformatics, Munich, Germany.

It is anticipated that further databases will join the consortium in the near future.

“Each IMEx partner brings specific skills to the table,” says Chris Hogue, principal investigator of BIND. “And the cumulative effort should result in an overarching database that is broader in scope and deeper in information than any individual efforts and one that scientists can use to better understand issues of health and disease or in the development of new drugs and therapeutics.”

In joining IMEx, each database is expected to provide and exchange data according to a series of rules that describe the format, availability, and suitability criteria of the data, as well as address the data submission process, data exchange and ownership issues, and IMEx implementation and organization.

Under the agreement, IMEx partners will provide data that meet the Human Proteome Organization’s Proteomics Standards Initiative (PSI) Molecular Interaction Format, and these data will be freely available to all users, whether for direct use or for redistribution. Likewise, with rare exceptions, all data will be supported by publication in a peer-reviewed medium and be derived from laboratory experiments. The IMEx consortium will also further develop common curation standards that will allow each centre to produce data to the same high standards.

“These rules are critical to the success of this collaboration,” explains Gianni Cesareni, principal investigator of MINT. “Too often in the past, scientists have been held hostage to different nomenclatures and presentation formats in disparate databases. By following simple guidelines, the IMEx partners offer scientists the opportunity to get the best value for their research efforts.”

Data exchange is expected to start in 2006 with immediate benefit to the user community. More information about the consortium is available at imex.sf.net. ●