



Health Awareness

Researchers Are Asking New Questions About Old Diseases TM

(NAPSA)—When it comes to medical research, the questions researchers ask can go a long way toward shaping the kinds of answers they get.

Sometimes, when researchers start to ask different kinds of questions, or just ask their questions in unusual ways, the answers can lead to new understanding about how diseases operate and, eventually, new kinds of treatment for those diseases.

That's why there has been some recent excitement about the way medical researchers have been asking questions about a group of diseases that are coming to be known as Immune-Mediated Inflammatory Disorders (I.M.I.D.).

What these disorders have in common are disturbances of the immune system that can lead to short-term (acute) or longer-term (chronic) inflammation—and subsequent tissue damage. The technical term for this is “immune dysregulation.”

By casting this wide net as a definition, researchers have begun to look at important similarities among diseases that appear—on the surface—to look very different, and include diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, psoriasis, multiple sclerosis and juvenile diabetes.

While the term I.M.I.D. includes the so-called “autoimmune” diseases like those mentioned above, it is important to understand that it also includes other forms of immune disorders,

including transplant rejection and some types of cancer.

Current thinking suggests that although each I.M.I.D. is different, all of these disorders share some similarities at the molecular level.

Progress in this arena may be good news for the estimated 14 to 22 million people in the United States affected by I.M.I.D., which tend to strike women more often than men.

The Federation of Clinical Immunology Societies (FOCIS) is fostering a national initiative, which brings together scientists and physicians from several top universities and hospitals across the country to help us all learn more about these diseases.

According to Dr. C. Garrison Fathman, “The FOCIS Centers reflect the growing awareness on the part of the medical community of the need to establish interdisciplinary relationships across usual organ and disease boundaries, to translate new knowledge in immunology into new therapies. These centers will advance the original vision of FOCIS by adding patient care, advocacy and community outreach to the initial success in interdisciplinary education and clinical research.”

Centocor, a Johnson & Johnson company based in Horsham, Pennsylvania, is one of the leaders in the effort to advance knowledge in the I.M.I.D. area. Centocor is supporting the FOCIS initiative as

well as conducting its own research into I.M.I.D.

“The impact of Immune-Mediated Inflammatory Disorders on the national health care system is immense, especially when you consider that perhaps one in four patients admitted to hospitals in the U.S. suffers from an I.M.I.D.,” says Julie McHugh, President, Centocor. “Centocor is committed to identifying the molecular targets that trigger these disorders and to developing new biopharmaceutical therapies, particularly monoclonal antibodies that improve the lives of patients with these devastating diseases.”

When studying possible approaches to treating I.M.I.D., researchers say there are several different ways to look at how best to regulate immune function. These include:

- Preventing certain types of cells from getting to the site of the inflammation;
- Preventing activation of the wrong cells at the inflammation site; and
- Finding ways to activate protective cells (“regulatory T cells”) that can inhibit the biologic substances (“cytokines”) that trigger inflammation.

Ultimately, a combination of these approaches may be necessary to get the best clinical results. But the first step is to expand our understanding of how I.M.I.D. causes these problems in humans.

To learn more, visit www.Centocor.com or www.focisnet.org.