

Q&A

Next February, **Richard Olds** will begin his tenure as dean of the planned new medical school at the University of California, Riverside. The school is due to open in 2012.



How did you become an expert in tropical diseases?

I grew up with a strong international perspective on life because my father was an ambassador to the United Nations. At one point I worked in refugee camps in Europe. But after college, I didn't know what to do until an administrator at Case Western Reserve University suggested I might make an interesting doctor. I went to medical school there, and found my passion was working with tropical diseases. Working in China, Egypt and the Philippines, I was among the first generation of physicians to go beyond basic public-health strategies and also apply modern medical science to diseases in developing countries.

How do you plan to shape the new Riverside programme?

I've always been an innovator. I'm dyslexic, so I tackle problems differently. I prefer to look outside the box to find innovative ways to distinguish my programmes

from others. At Riverside, I want to use those skills to develop a programme that can anticipate where the field is going, for example finding new ways to diagnose and manage diseases such as diabetes, so that I can effectively educate the doctors of the future.

How might you train doctors of the future differently?

Historically, medical-school students are taught through lectures. Although cost effective, this is the worst way to communicate information. The most effective way to learn material is to teach it yourself. I want to create a teaching culture — where everybody teaches and everybody learns. In that environment, physicians will also learn how to educate patients better about disease management, which will be crucial in the future.

Will the ongoing health-care debate, and possible reform, affect how your programme develops?

It should. We have a

tremendous opportunity to build this school to reflect any changes that occur as this country addresses health-care reform. Other medical schools will have to overcome the fact that they are organized on the basis of traditional views of how health care is delivered.

Will your international background prove useful in this endeavour?

Yes. This ethnically diverse region of California has some of the worst health-care statistics in the country and a serious physician shortage. To retain physicians here, we need to find ways to encourage members of this diverse community to go to medical school. My international experiences taught me how to reach out to communities and build strong partnerships with public-health officials and health-care providers — skills that will be needed to create the community-based programmes that are necessary to improve health. ■

Interview by Virginia Gewin

POSTDOC JOURNAL

Sharing ideas and data



Recently, a researcher asked me to provide more information about a paper of mine. I had a mixed reaction: flattery, but also hesitation. I appreciated that others were reading and enjoying it. Yet, despite being an ardent supporter of open access, I couldn't help wondering whether this researcher might find a new, exciting result that I had overlooked.

Authors are obliged to provide data and unique reagents freely to the scientific community. However, before publication, the sharing of ideas and data

is played out like a high-stakes game of poker. What data do I show and what data do I hold close my chest? Everyone is vying for the highest-impact publication in a world of 'publish or perish'.

Despite the ostensible drawbacks, much is gained by sharing data with colleagues. After our last weekly lab meeting, a fellow postdoc asked me for some of my unpublished data sets to help her interpret her own data. I was more than happy to help out. A sense of collegial trust and respect assured me that we could both benefit from

this exchange of data. Indeed, it allowed us both to look at our projects from a different perspective and to brainstorm new hypotheses to test.

Unpublished data shared judiciously at conferences is also beneficial to the scientific community and ultimately helps to advance science. Nevertheless, filling these conference halls are hundreds of poker players, mulling over their respective hands. ■

Bryan Venters is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Eukaryotic Gene Regulation at Pennsylvania State University, University Park.

IN BRIEF

NIH asked to probe ethics

One hundred health-care and policy executives and professionals are asking the head of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) to fund studies on medical ethics and conflicts of interest in medicine. In a 17 November letter to NIH director Francis Collins, the multinational group warns that relationships between industry and academics, medical educators and clinicians are flawed. The signatories seek to learn the extent to which commercial bias compromises medical and health-care information, and to identify appropriate interventions. A spokesman for the NIH says that the agency has not formally received the letter and could not comment.

Disease threat assessed

The US Wildlife Trust is looking to support up to 40 postdocs and researchers in an effort to find and predict diseases that move between wild animals and humans. The non-profit trust is assembling eight teams of scientists to work in Asia and South America to detect disease hot spots and determine how to respond. The effort, funded with about US\$15 million over five years, is one of five initiatives of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), collectively known as the Emerging Pandemic Threats Program. The project builds on USAID's monitoring of the H5N1 influenza virus in wild birds to address the broader role of wildlife in emerging human diseases.

Asia takes clean-tech lead

The clean-technology triumvirate of China, Japan and South Korea has already surpassed the United States in producing most of the world's clean technology, according to a report. *Rising Tigers, Sleeping Giant* predicts that the three nations will also grab most of the sector's available private equity in the short term if nothing changes. Released on 18 November by two Washington DC think tanks, the report also finds that the United States lags far behind the three Asian nations in terms of federal funding and legislation to support research and production in most clean technologies. China will invest \$397 billion over the next five years in clean technologies, the report says, compared with just \$172 billion in the United States.