

Singapore

A*STAR's newest research institute, Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences, opens in the Brenner Center for Molecular Medicine



Honoring Nobel laureate Sydney Brenner by building a bridge between "bench" and "bedside"

The Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences (SICS) and its new building the Brenner Center for Molecular Medicine (Brenner Center) were officially recently. SICS is the newest biomedical research institute set-up by A*STAR (Agency for Science, Technology and Research).

Headquartered in Biopolis, SICS will have its first research laboratories at the Brenner Center located adjacent to the National University of Singapore campus. The Brenner Center is the first building anywhere to be named after the Nobel Laureate Dr Sydney Brenner to honor the legendary scientist's devotion to Singapore science and to celebrate a key milestone in Singapore's Biomedical Sciences (BMS) Initiative.

"SICS will play a key role in developing a strong clinical science programme in Singapore of international standing. This will be critical in Phase Two of Singapore's BMS initiative (Years 2006 to 2010) where the focus is on translating the excellent basic sciences at Biopolis to improving health and patient care. SICS will add to A*STAR's overall research capabilities and support the Ministry of Health in its translational and clinical research objectives," said Mr Lim Chuan Poh, chairman of A*STAR who was officiating at the official opening on 20 April 2007.

Unlike the other A*STAR biomedical sciences research institutes that are centralized within the Biopolis, SICS will have, in addition to its Biopolis facilities, research laboratories that are located close to or possibly in the healthcare clusters. The Brenner Center is SICS's first such research facility outside of Biopolis.

"Locating the Brenner Center in the heart of a medical campus reflects our commitment at A*STAR to improving the healthcare and quality of people's lives," said Professor Judith Swain, Executive Director of SICS. Professor Swain joined A*STAR one year ago from the University of California at San Diego, where she was Professor of Medicine, Dean for Translational Medicine and the Founding Director of the College of Integrated Life Sciences.

SICS will initially have three disease-oriented intramural research programmes. The institute has two existing programs in Infectious Diseases and Genetic Medicine and will be initiating a Metabolic Diseases (focused on diabetes, obesity, insulin resistance) at the end of this year, the new institute aims to be a critical link between A*STAR's basic research foundation and the growing base of translational, clinical and health-outcomes research in the medical schools, disease centres and restructured hospitals.

"The institute will build a bridge between the bedside and the laboratory bench, reflecting Dr Sydney Brenner's belief in the power of basic research that is inspired by the questions and ideas of clinical researchers and physicians who are on the front line of patient care. It will also develop technologies that would facilitate investigational medicine, studying man as the model system," added Dr Swain.

Dr Brenner, who has been on Singapore's Biomedical Sciences International Advisory Council since the inception of the BMS initiative and who was recently appointed Scientific Adviser to Chairman A*STAR, said, "A strong and internationally competitive clinical science program will enable Singapore to realize the full potential of its substantial investment in the biomedical sciences."

"I am honored and proud to ride the exciting wave of Singapore's new developments and to have the building, Brenner Center for Molecular Medicine, named after me. Singapore has progressed significantly in the biomedical research field especially since 2000 and I am proud to have been part of these exciting developments. I went into molecular biology in the 1960s and helped build up Singapore's first research institute, the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology, in 1987. Since then, Singapore has developed solid foundation in basic science and I hope to see all these contributions in science ultimately benefiting people," said Dr Brenner, an honorary citizen of Singapore since 2003.

Mr Lim Chuan Poh, Chairman of A*STAR, pointed out, "Singapore is very compact and nimble and this is a major advantage when it comes to launching innovative programs in this new discipline of translational and clinical research. "SICS also has the advantage of being located in a nation that is home to the three ethnic populations representing a substantial portion of Asia's population. Any discovery and novel technology that is developed in Singapore will not only benefit Singapore's population, but will also be highly relevant to the rest of Asia Pacific as well as the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry." 🌐