



MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian Biotech Leaders Set to Expand Global Connections: Inaugural Advancing BioBusiness Award Winners Announced

Two of Australia's leading life scientists have been chosen from a highly competitive field of candidates to take part in a new initiative by Merck Sharp & Dohme and Advance to boost the capability of the country's burgeoning biotechnology industry and gain increased health and economic benefits for the nation.

Biota Executive Director Drug Discovery, John Lambert, and Cytopia's Chief Scientific Officer, Andrew Wilks, have been selected as winners of the inaugural Advancing BioBusiness Award, which aims to expand global connections for Australian science and facilitate more global collaborations for local biotechnology companies.

They will attend the world's largest biotechnology meeting, the Biotechnology Industry Organisation international convention in Boston, in May which attracts some 22,000 visitors.

In addition they will participate in a tailored program of meetings with leading American organisations and individuals including venture capital firms, research institutes, biotechnology entrepreneurs and biopharmaceutical companies, to further their knowledge and build valuable international networks and collaborations that will benefit their businesses and the Australian industry.

Professor Graham Macdonald, External Licensing Co-ordinator at Merck Sharp & Dohme and chair of the Advancing BioBusiness Award judging panel, said the pilot program aims to open new doors for Australian life scientists to help lift the country's success in the global market place.

"Australia is recognised for its excellence in medical research and its vigorous and creative biotechnology industry. In spite of this, the number of drug development projects which reach advanced clinical development is only a quarter of what would be predicted on the basis of our output in scientific literature," said Professor Macdonald. "This lack of experience of success possibly contributes to the low level of biotechnology investment in Australia."

“By immersing two of our top biotechnology people in successful commercial research centres in the United States, and providing them with opportunities to share their learning back at home, we aim to build a stronger Australian capability to win in this highly competitive global knowledge market,” he said.

Professor Macdonald said the two executives were the stand-out winners for the Award because both their companies were on a critical path in their drug development programs with some good international licensing agreements secured and new compounds in early development or clinical trials.

“They convinced the judging panel they would benefit significantly from this unique opportunity by putting forward well-considered programmes of experience with outstanding target centres,” he said.

Federal Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources, the Hon. Ian Macfarlane, said the Australian Government welcomed this timely initiative by Merck Sharp and Dohme and Advance.

“We see enormous business opportunities in partnerships between Australian health and medical research and the global biopharmaceuticals industry, and the Advancing BioBusiness Award complements the policy approach we have taken to encourage the commercialisation of Australian ideas,” said Mr Macfarlane.

About Advance

Advance is a community of Australian professionals overseas headquartered in New York City, with established chapters in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington DC and London with several others in formation around the globe. Advance recognises the importance of maintaining connection with the one million Australians in our diaspora making their mark in boardrooms, science laboratories, arts institutions, classrooms and communities worldwide. We provide online and live services and events in major industry sectors, enabling Australians abroad to be informed ambassadors-at-large who open doors and opportunities for Australia and Australians across the globe. Advance is an independent not-for-profit with an educational and charitable fund in the United States. (www.advance.org).

About Merck Sharp & Dohme (Australia) Pty Limited

Merck Sharp & Dohme is the Australian subsidiary of the global research-based pharmaceutical company Merck & Co Inc. Since 1995 Merck Sharp & Dohme has brought more than 20 new medicines to Australians, including therapies to treat high blood cholesterol, osteoporosis, asthma, high blood pressure and HIV/AIDS. In the next five years, Merck Sharp & Dohme anticipates bringing many more medicines to Australians, including significant advances in diabetes and cancer. Through its ongoing support of innovative research and science in Australia - from sponsoring the Australian Science Olympiads for high school students to actively partnering with Australian researchers to bring their discoveries to the world – Merck Sharp & Dohme hopes to uncover tomorrow’s advances in disease treatment and prevention.

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