

## **NIH Director holds town hall meeting**

On Wednesday, National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director, Dr. Francis Collins, met with representatives of the biomedical research community. Just 4 weeks into his newly appointed position, Dr. Collins spoke to an audience that filled the Natcher Auditorium on the NIH campus. Stating that this was “the first to its kind constituent meeting” to provide attendees with some insight into the “ideas of exceptional opportunity” that the new Director and Center and Institute Directors have been discussing. Dr. Collins thanked his predecessors for their work in creating the contemporary NIH, reflected on his career trajectory from high school chemistry to NIH Director, and recognized the leadership of President Obama and his appreciation of the importance of science and the opportunities it provides.

Director Collins discussed 5 opportunities for NIH and the constituents attendees represented:

- Opportunity 1 - Improved use of genomics and high throughput technologies to understand fundamental biology and specific causes of disease. Technologies included nanotechnology, bioimaging, microbiome project.
- Opportunity 2 - Translating basic science discoveries into new and better treatment. This opportunity was highlighted by a picture of pre-Golden Gate Bridge San Francisco Bay with Basic Science on the Marin Headlands side and Drugs on the city side.
- Opportunity 3 - Putting science to work for the benefit of health reform. The discussion included references to comparative effectiveness, pharmacogenomics and personalized medicine, healthcare research economics aimed at controlling costs yet improving outcomes.
- Opportunity 4 - Global health- encouraging a greater focus on the needs of at risk populations around the world
- Opportunity 5 - Reinvigorating and empowering the biomedical research community. The Director mentioned the decline in competitive global standing of American science, the need to improve the success rates for new investigators who currently stand a 1 in 5 chance of being funded, continuing to support the NIH Roadmap for Medical Research established under the leadership of Elias Zerhouni, better support for Pioneer Awards, transformative RO1s and training programs especially for under represented scientists.

Constituents were asked to:

- work toward a “common and consistent voice in support of the importance of medical research;”
- “develop new and compelling ways to describe NIH supported research to decision makers and the public;” and
- “keep the channels of communication between NIH and constituents wide open.”

During the question period Dr. Collins:

- diplomatically indicated that \$40 billion in annual appropriations could readily be utilized by NIH;
- admitted that there were serious gaps in the translation of new knowledge into practice that need to be addressed;
- indicated that he would seek collaborative opportunities within and outside HHS; and
- recognized the importance of academic/private partnerships especially towards new drug entity development. He mentioned, as an example, that one company in Maryland had a huge catalog of molecules that was not being sufficiently utilized by researchers. He also mentioned the new NIH program Therapeutics for Rare and Neglected Diseases (TRND) program.

<http://www.nih.gov/news/health/may2009/nhgri-20.htm>

*In an effort to “keep the channels of communication between NIH and constituents wide open.” the Director asked that each group submit a brief summary of issues the NIH Director and Institute and Center Directors should know about. This should be a list of no more than one-half a page. Please submit your thoughts to me at [wlang@aacp.org](mailto:wlang@aacp.org) by the end of September. I will compile and send to the Director as requested.*