

Study Group on the Crisis in Psychiatric Drug Discovery: Mark Rasenick and Bill Potter

The study group commenced with an introduction where Mark Rasenick described the current "perfect storm" wherein Pharma has largely abandoned psychiatry, due in part, to the relative difficulty of identifying drug targets with a clear hypothetical basis to disease. At the same time, NIH dollars available for the fundamental research that will allow discovery of those targets is diminishing. With this as the stage, the panelists addressed how their own constituencies might offer solutions.

John Greden represented the academic community and suggested that more profound academic collaboration and enhanced data sharing could allow far more progress than the isolated "academic entrepreneur."

Anand Pandya described how NAMI could help unite the advocacy community to work with researchers in the acquisition of resources, to advocate for greater public support of psychiatric research and to raise awareness of the problem outside the research community. He discussed how stigma against psychiatric disease also plays a role in the lack of emphasis in drug discovery.

Beth Hoffmann, Vertex, spoke of direct action by the advocacy community in the financing of a novel therapeutic agent for cystic fibrosis. One of the drugs, paid for by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and discovered/developed by Vertex is awaiting an FDA decision (due by April).

Jeff Nye, J&J, spoke of how Industry needs to engage in greater openness and greater sharing of data. He also spoke of the necessity of industry to partner with the academic community and with industrial partners to reach a common goal.

Finally Steve Hyman, filling in for Patrick Kennedy, described the 1 Mind for Research Campaign, which intends to bring the various constituencies together, both to directly support and to advocate for research.

Bill Potter led the discussion, which was both lively and protracted.

Conclusions: All participants agreed that there was a crisis in drug discovery and "blame" was to be shared by a number of the constituencies represented in the study group. Several participants expressed some consternation about the current tack being taken by the NIH, which was thought to represent a diminishing emphasis on investigator-initiated, idea driven research and an increased focus on both large-scale projects and targeted research projects. The possible involvement of NIH in drug development was also raised as a concern. There was a general agreement that there was a requirement for a single organization that represents the constituencies listed above. While there was some concern that 1 Mind may not be the perfect group, there was consensus that it was the only group engaged in this manner and should be supported by constituencies in the study group.