

New fluoroquinolone. The first presentations were made at this meeting of a new fluoroquinolone from Bayer, BAY12-803, with activity very close to that of trovafloxacin. Pharmacokinetic data in human subjects for doses up to 400 mg were presented, and animal studies suggested a negligible potential for phototoxicity. This compound is still at an early stage, but could be a strong rival for trovafloxacin. The keen interest in this field was illustrated by the other presentations describing fluoroquinolones still at preclinical

stages from Toyama, Wakanaya, Hokuriki Seiyaki and Cheil Jedang.

Intractable problem

A common theme at the conference was the ability, sooner or later, of the microbe to develop resistance to any agent, even those that are structurally unrelated to existing antibiotics. This is particularly marked with the enterococcus, one of the most difficult groups to inhibit. A number of speakers believed that the way forward was not a total reliance on the pharma-

ceutical industry, but the careful and more controlled use of both existing and new agents, perhaps in rotation and in combination, together with stringent infection-control methods. Undoubtedly, the problem of resistance to antimicrobials in Gram-positives is not going to be solved easily or permanently.

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Book review

Ethical Issues in Drug Research: Through a Glass Darkly by M. J. Parnham, IOS Press, 1996. £48.00 (x + 155 pages)
ISBN 90 5199 279 3

The past decade or so has seen a dramatic increase in the number of books on applied ethics. Writing in this field is not easy. A moral philosopher may know little of the specific topic in hand; a specialist in the particular field may know little ethics; a multi-author volume may be turgid and dull. Nevertheless, the genre is by now well enough established for there to be an increasing number of excellent books on such subjects as environmental ethics, medical ethics, our use of animals and genetic engineering.

The time is therefore ripe for a first-rate book on ethical issues in drug research. I am afraid, though, that this is not it. In fairness, this is, in many ways, a well written book. It covers a tremendous amount and parts of it I enjoyed reading considerably. I think I would enjoy sitting next to Parnham at a dinner party.

The chief problem is simply that the author is not expert in ethics. The days have gone when anyone, however well meaning, can write a book on ethics without a serious academic grounding in the subject. For example, Parnham's attempt to

summarize Singer's views on animal experiments and his critique of Singer are wholly inadequate.

A second problem is Parnham's avowal of Christianity. As a Church of England minister I am more likely, it might be supposed, than many to be convinced of the acceptability of such a position. However, in a multicultural society a book on ethics that presupposes a particular religious viewpoint needs, at the very least, some sort of substantive analysis of how its own assumptions relate to those held by humanists and adherents of other religions; unfortunately, we do not get this. Also, there are places where the writing could be considered offensive or even construed as racist.

Parnham's book certainly stimulates thought and I would be happy to recommend it as a retirement present for someone who had worked all his or her life in drug discovery.

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In short...

In December **Aurora Biosciences** and **Bristol-Myers Squibb** (BMS) announced a research and licensing agreement that could be worth over \$40 million. The deal gives BMS rights to use Aurora's fluorescent screening technology and also sets the terms for a collaboration on the development of Aurora's ultra-high-throughput screening (ultra-HTS) system. This miniaturized, automated system is targeted to screen 100,000 samples per day using proprietary fluorescence-based screens. Aurora is hoping to find two or three additional collaborators, who will get co-exclusive access to the ultra-HTS system.