

company will put together a screening kit that it will offer to academic laboratories in an attempt to identify new drug targets. The kit would contain approximately 25 spider and scorpion venoms that would be made available on a coded basis to an outside laboratory for screening in its bioassays. If something interesting was found, NPS would ask the right of first refusal to collaborate on the project and to develop any drug leads that might arise.

Another possibility is to use the venom program as a basis to collaborate

with other pharmaceutical companies or to develop collaborative relationships with agricultural companies to test the venoms as possible biopesticides. These are not new ideas; in the past NPS had collaborative relationships with Pfizer (New York, NY, USA) and FMC (Princeton, NJ, USA) to search for novel compounds including pesticides.

Finally, as in any corporate environment, there is always the possibility that a program might be discontinued so that its resources can be redirected. "The venom program is valuable as a tool to

identify new targets, and new activities are frequently discovered by those studying venoms. Our dilemma at the moment is that the spider program utilizes a significant portion of our resources," says Hook. "We are in the position where we would like to partner this program with an institution that is more directed in this area of research." So, spider, scorpion, centipede venoms anyone?

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Society for Biomolecular Screening – origin and future role

In the late 1980s, high-throughput screening (HTS), which was a new science, drew upon expertise from all other disciplines without therapeutic area boundaries. Although it began as the means of identifying starting points, screening has quickly become the focal point of drug discovery by identifying lead molecules for the start of synthetic chemistry programs. Scientists involved in HTS belong to a variety of disciplines including biochemistry, microbiology, molecular biology, chemistry, pharmacology, cell biology, engineering and computer-based technologies. In addition, many of the screening staff have affiliations with therapeutic areas, such as neuroscience or immunology. Screening developed into both a science and an art. As a result, the scientists involved in screening needed a forum through which to interact, exchange ideas and develop and evaluate new technologies. In mid-1994, the Society for Biomolecular Screening (SBS) was conceived, bringing the new science of screening under one umbrella.

Exchange of information

The SBS is designed to enhance the exchange of information concerning the

science of screening, including topics such as assay design, sample diversity, information management, automation and access to screening resources. The SBS sponsors short courses, working groups and publications, and has a dedicated quarterly publication, the *Journal of Biomolecular Screening*. The SBS also has a Web homepage (<http://sbsonline.com>) and has created 'Society Forum', which gives members the opportunity to exchange ideas.

The Society is governed by a council of nine members. The council has both industrial and academic representation, and each member has expertise in screening and screening technologies. The council elects the officers of the SBS. The office of the society is in Danbury, CT, USA and the office staff are accessible via e-mail (C_Giordano@prodigy.com) and regular mail (36 Tamarack Avenue, Suite 348, Danbury, CT 06811, USA).

There are now approximately 600 members in the SBS, and it continues to grow. Members are drawn from the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry and equipment and reagent manufacturers, as well as from the academic community. Many new technologies have an academic origin and an interac-

tion with the industrial partners has allowed the timely application of such technologies. Funding for the society is primarily through membership, corporate contributions and conference fees.

Meetings and awards

The 1996 Annual Meeting of the SBS, held in Basel, Switzerland, was well attended and involved lively discussion. The 3rd Annual Meeting will be held in San Diego on 22–24 September 1997. The program for this meeting is ambitious and has been expanded to include new areas for screening such as genomics and microrobotics. The SBS has instituted its first award – The Wallac Award – for innovation in HTS.

As screening continues to expand its scientific base and influence in the drug industry, the SBS will gain strength and will play a central role in defining the future of screening.

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