

introduction

The shape of the worldwide pharmaceutical industry has changed markedly in the past decade or so with a series of mergers resulting in fewer, larger companies. There seems every likelihood that this trend will continue.

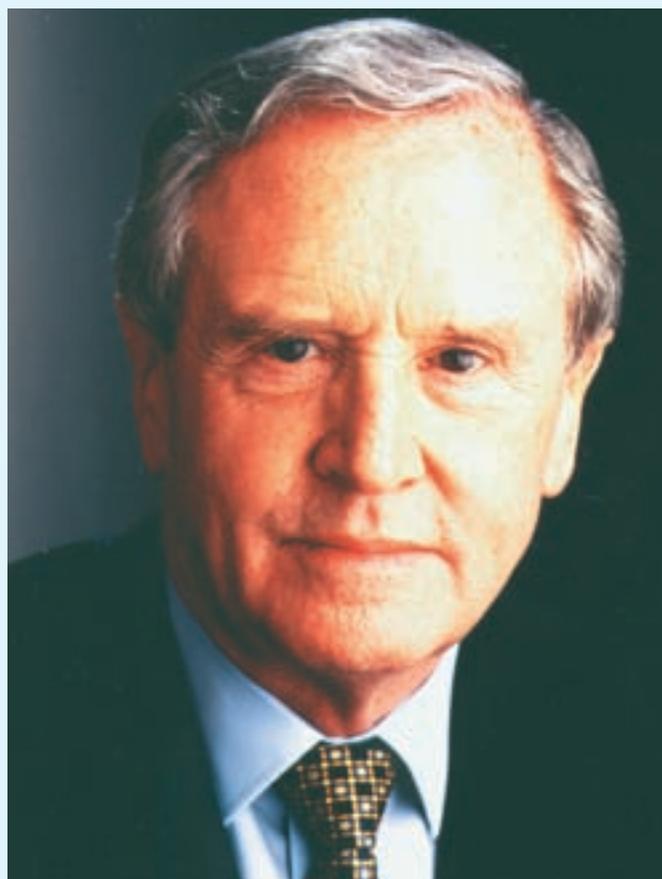
These large organisations have to sustain profitability in an environment of increasing pressure on healthcare budgets. To achieve this, a steady stream of innovative drug candidates must enter their development pipelines. Allowing for the inevitable attrition among these candidates as they proceed through the development process, it is unlikely that even the biggest companies will be able to provide enough leads from their in-house discovery activities. 'Big pharma' will, therefore, rely increasingly on smaller companies, many of them in the so-called biotechnology sector, to develop and exploit new technologies and methodologies to provide new leads.

Many of the new technologies will be aimed at exploiting data derived from the human genome project. Most of the 100,000 or so genes in the human genome will soon have been identified. Other technologies, some of which are discussed in this issue of *Drug Discovery World*, will, however, have to be applied to this genomic information before leads to new medicines emerge.

DDW, by commissioning articles from experts worldwide, will aim to give its readers insights into the potential of new technologies and methodologies in the drug discovery and development process. Importantly, the authors of these will be encouraged to discuss the implications of these technical and scientific advances for the various facets of business which are involved in a modern pharmaceutical company.

In this first issue there are articles dealing with genomics, proteomics, bioinformatics, high throughput screening and combinatorial chemistry but other new approaches, less clearly related to the human genome project, are not neglected here nor will they be in future issues. For example, as the complexities of the immune system continue to be unravelled there is renewed focus on immunotherapy, including the development of therapeutic (as opposed to prophylactic) vaccines. There is also a resurgence of interest in plant-derived medicines as modern analytical and synthetic techniques make this a much more practical proposition than previously.

These advances create a new environment for those who develop drugs including contract research organisations which are increasingly used by pharmaceutical companies as they out-



source more of their development activities. New problems are also posed for the drug regulatory agencies and, of course, for those who market, prescribe and use new drugs.

We would like to make *DDW* a vehicle in which all those interested in the discovery, development and use of new medicines can express and exchange views. So we hope to include in future issues a correspondence section for comments on published articles and on all aspects of modern drug discovery. We shall welcome suggestions for new articles especially if they deal with the business implications, as well as the technical aspects, of new technologies, strategies and approaches.

Finally, we would ask you to ensure that you receive your next issue of *Drug Discovery World* by taking a few minutes to complete and return the FREE subscription form contained within.

Dr Roger W Brimblecombe PhD, DSc, FRCPath, FIBiol