

Collaboration the key to unlock new drugs ^[1]

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Video of Collaboration: The key to unlock new drugs

Harnessing the combined expertise of a global network of researchers is critical to understanding neglected diseases and changing how they are treated, according to Florencia Pereyra Segal, a senior investigator at the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research (NIBR).

Pereyra Segal joined NIBR's Translational Medicine group last year to develop experimental therapies for infectious diseases. Her move into industry came after more than a decade working as a physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital and as a researcher at the Ragon Institute of MGH, MIT and Harvard, where she was engaged in work to find treatments and vaccines for HIV/AIDS. She had also been on the faculty of Harvard Medical School.

It's very nice to be able to do that in an environment that actually rewards you for looking for somebody with an entirely different perspective on something... to develop a drug that's going to change the lives of people..

The most striking aspect of working in Translational Medicine, says Pereyra Segal, is the extent to which she's part of a global team effort. "When you think about the diseases we're trying to solve here, they're very big problems, very complex, and it's highly unlikely a single individual will be able to solve those puzzles on his own," she says. "It behooves us to work as a team and to really take the best of every single area of expertise.

NIBR has chosen to consolidate its translational medicine expertise in a single global network of more than 350 highly qualified physicians and scientists at sites in Switzerland, the US and China. This model facilitates the sharing of translational ideas and knowledge across disease areas. Also, because they work at the interface of basic research and clinical application, Translational Medicine specialists are involved in a rich variety of interactions with scientists elsewhere in NIBR, across the wider Novartis organization and beyond. They include biologists, chemists, biostatisticians, epidemiologists, drug metabolism and pharmacokinetics specialists, regulatory experts and scientists from biotechnology firms and academic centers.

No wonder that Pereyra Segal, even after many years spent at world-leading teaching hospitals and research institutes, says she has never before experienced such extensive collaboration.

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