

Europe to launch a brain research project

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The European Science Foundation said it will propose a comprehensive mental health research effort of a size similar to that of the Human Genome Project.

The proposal -- to be discussed during the Foundation's annual EuroBioForum in Lisbon, Portugal -- is aimed at making Europe the global leader of research in the critical role of neurotransmitters in brain disorders.

Foundation officials said the project would bring together the efforts of scientists from a broad array of specialized areas, such as biochemistry, molecular biology, psychopharmacology and imaging techniques.

Professor David Nutt of the University of Bristol will lead the project to develop new methods of identifying the release of neurotransmitters, such as serotonin and dopamine, in the brain. Researchers would then be better able to examine the role of neurotransmitters in major mental disorders, including depression and schizophrenia.

Despite the vast number of affected people, Nutt said, "We don't even know ... whether serotonin levels are high or low in depressed people."

He said he believes the conference will help people from universities, governments, industry and funding organizations to "share ideas and contribute to key policy and funding decisions."

The EuroBioForum meeting will run Wednesday through Friday.

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