

Medical data 'Internet' goes live, boosts research

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Medical and life scientists will be able to share information collected from many thousands of cases thanks to a digital network being launched at The Australian National University in Canberra today.

The ANU node of BioGrid will be launched at 11am this morning at the John Curtin School of Medical Research, Garran Road, ANU by Senator Kate Lundy. Members of the media are invited to attend for a demonstration of the Grid and interviews.

The ACT node of the BioGrid network is a collaborative venture between ANU and BioGrid Australia. It will allow practitioners from hospitals, universities and research centres to share and aggregate data on diseases like cancer, dementia, diabetes and cystic fibrosis.

"BioGrid is like a large medical Internet, meaning that clinical researchers can access information from existing research and clinical databases across many disease types at multiple institutions," explains Dr Andrew Janke, a researcher with expertise in medical databases at the ANU Medical School.

"There are thousands of records of patient data available on the Grid, which has a high level of security to ensure that the integrity of the information and privacy of individuals are protected. There is also a very high standard of ethical checks in place at each of the node institutions."

Researchers using BioGrid will be able to extract the de-identified data

they need to test hypotheses using their own analytical tools. The information in the virtual repository will be extracted on a regular basis from all source databases and then mapped back into local repositories at each site.

The ACT node of BioGrid will be used initially for clinical research in oncology, ageing and dementia as part of larger Australian projects including the Australian Cancer Grid and ANDI-CN (The Australian Normative and Dementia Imaging Collaborative Network). The computing grunt work will be provided by the ANU supercomputer facility, the most powerful of its kind in Australia.

"The evolving linkages with the BioGrid network provides a great step forward for clinical researchers in Australia," says Associate Professor Desmond Yip, a Medical Oncologist with the ANU Medical School.

"The burden of disease continues to grow at a rate that resources for research and treatment can't match. BioGrid will allow the best clinical minds in this country to pool resources to perform important research with larger datasets, as well as to carry out quality assurance activities to compare disease incidence and patterns of care between different institutions and regions. This has enormous benefits to researchers, research participants and the general public who stand to benefit from future discoveries."

Source: Research Australia

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