

Lifting the veil of secrecy surrounding development of new medicines

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An unlikely effort is underway to lift the veil of nearly-total secrecy that has surrounded the process of developing new prescription drugs for the last century, scientists said today at the 240th National Meeting of the American Chemical Society (ACS). The upheaval in traditional practice would make key data available to college students, university professors, and others in an open, collective process.

Called open-source drug discovery, the new approach involves an online community of computer users from around the world working together to discover and develop much-needed new drugs. It could lead to inexpensive drugs to treat a wide variety of diseases, including tuberculosis and malaria, that claim a huge toll in developing countries.

Scientists from government, industry, and academia are presenting a dozen reports on this topic during a special symposium entitled "Open-source Drug Discover" at the ACS meeting.

Open-source drug discovery is a movement as well as an evolving program. The Open Source Drug Discovery (OSDD) Consortium, for instance, is a worldwide scientific community of more than 3000 people from 74 countries that was launched in 2008 by India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the country's largest research and development organization. People can participate in the program by logging into a Web site: www.osdd.net

"I believe this is the way to go about not only drug discovery, but it may

be a way of doing science in the future," said OSDD Project Director Samir Brahmachari, Ph.D. "Everybody can contribute."

Brahmachari, who is director general of CSIR and one of the pioneers of the open-source movement, notes that most drug discoveries are made in a closed-door environment in which pharmaceutical companies keep drug development information under wraps and limit participation of the academic world, such as colleges and universities. The OSDD program aims to address this issue by attempting to attract the youngest and brightest minds around the globe to be part of the [drug discovery](#) movement, he said.

One of the aims of the project is to develop a new drug for tuberculosis, which kills almost two million people each year worldwide. OSDD recently announced a step toward this goal by providing a comprehensive map of the genome of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, the bacterium that causes the disease.

"Open-source drug R&D is a broad concept that has many faces," said Michael Hurrey, Ph.D., program chair of the ACS Division of Business Development and Management, which is hosting the symposium. He is currently a chemist with Vertex Pharmaceuticals in Cambridge, Mass. "Our symposium will feature some of its proudest accomplishments in the hope that some in the audience will feel emboldened to join the movement and build upon that foundation."

Provided by American Chemical Society

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