

A*Star, NUS recruit US genomics expert

Joint recruitment is part of their effort to bring scientific and industry talent to Singapore

Rei Kurohi

The Agency for Science, Technology and Research's (A*Star) Genome Institute of Singapore (GIS) and the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine have jointly recruited genomics expert Kevin White, as part of an effort to bring scientific and industry talent to Singapore.

GIS and NUS Medicine said in a joint statement yesterday that Dr White, 50, will take on the role of programme director of nucleic acid therapeutics (NAT) and senior group leader at GIS, where he will be responsible for coordinating programmes that address key challenges faced by the industry and medical community in implementing NAT.

NAT is an emerging field of medicine which uses nucleic acids like DNA and RNA to treat a range of diseases, including cancer and viral infections.

One prominent example of NAT is the use of Covid-19 vaccines based on messenger RNA technology, including the ones currently used in Singapore manufactured by Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech.

Dr White will also be appointed a professor in the Department of Biochemistry and the Precision Medicine Translational Research Programme at NUS Medicine, where he will lead a discovery programme that focuses on understanding the function of genetic variation in disease and biology.

Dr White, an American, was previously the president and chief scientific officer of Tempus, a United States-based precision medicine company he helped found, which specialises in genomic testing and predictive algorithms to treat cancer and other disorders.

Before founding Tempus, he was a professor of human genetics and medicine at the University of

Chicago. While there, he served as founding director of the university's Institute for Genomics and Systems Biology, which he led from 2006 to 2016.

In the statement, GIS executive director Patrick Tan said Dr White will bring with him a wealth of industry and scientific expertise, particularly in the conduct of early to mid-stage biotechnology companies.

Professor Chong Yap Seng, dean of NUS Medicine, said Dr White is a fitting and valuable addition to the school.

He added: "His remarkable expertise in functional genomics and precision medicine, alongside his wide entrepreneurial and industry experience, will position the school as a thought leader in precision medicine in Asia and beyond.

"Not only will he help foster multidisciplinary collaborations between researchers in the medical sciences and computing and engineering sciences, he will also provide valuable mentorship to younger researchers, clinician scientists and graduate students



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PHOTO: NUS

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Dr White said the field of precision medicine is experiencing a rapid expansion of diagnostic and predictive analytic capabilities for identifying therapeutic targets, but the ability to develop personalised therapeutics is not keeping pace.

"There is a growing need for low-cost, rapidly deployable and personalisable platforms for therapeutic development, and to advance this field the NAT programme will be focused on translating cutting-edge RNA and DNA-based approaches into therapies and vaccines, using both viral and non-viral delivery mechanisms."

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VALUABLE EXPERTISE

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PROFESSOR CHONG YAP SENG, dean of NUS Medicine, about Dr Kevin White.