

## Strategic Plan 2010–20: Extraordinary Opportunities

**Sir Mark Walport, Director of the Wellcome Trust, introduces the Trust's new Strategic Plan for the coming decade.**

**MW:** I'm delighted to have the opportunity to introduce the Wellcome Trust new Strategic Plan for the next ten years, starting this year. And our vision is to achieve extraordinary improvements to human and animal health. So how are we going to do this? What are we going to do is we're going to support the brightest minds in biomedical research and in the medical humanities. So we're very much focusing on people but we're going to provide them with five major research challenges. And we're going to first of all challenge them to maximise the health benefits of genetics and genomics, and the Wellcome Trust has of course supported the sequencing of a third of the human genome. And that's now turning into important discoveries about genetic variation in health and disease, and the question now is: well how can we turn that into actual advances in human health? How will it actually lead to the development of new diagnostics and new therapies?

Our second challenge is a big one, which is to understand the brain – and that is a huge, in many ways it's the most important frontier in terms of understanding human biology. And we need to do this if we're really going to make inroads into the important mental illnesses that afflict so many people. So that's the second challenge area.

The third area is combating infectious disease. And I think everyone is aware of the impact that infectious diseases have, and this is something that really brings together human and animal health, because we've seen infections change from animals into humans. So SARS virus, flu, and this is the area we support particularly in our international programmes, which are very important to us and which we'll continue to grow.

Our fourth challenge is investigating development, ageing and chronic disease, and that's very much about understanding human physiology, understanding how the physiology of mice for example can contribute to our understanding of human disease, and it's about systems biology, and it's absolutely underpinning if we're going to really deal with our fifth challenge area, which is about connecting the environment, nutrition and health. And of course human populations around the world are getting fatter, even in the developing world: as food becomes more available, obesity is becoming a bigger problem. And so we really need to understand some of the behavioural aspects, we need to understand the social context of that. These are really big challenging questions.

So essentially the focus of our funding is going to be on enabling outstanding researchers to tackle important questions, we want to accelerate the application of research, so that discoveries can actually lead to improvements in human health, and we want to explore medicine in its historical and cultural context.

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