

## Scientists inaugurate inflammation faculty

By Kelly Lenox

Scientists from NIEHS and NTP came together Mar. 11 for the inaugural meeting of the NIEHS inflammation faculty.

Fred Miller, M.D., Ph.D., explained the origin of the group by saying "After the completion of the NIEHS [strategic plan](#), six high priority areas were chosen as areas of focus across the Institute, and inflammation is one of those." Miller, head of the NIEHS Environmental Autoimmunity Group, and Janice Allen, Ph.D., scientific review officer in the NIEHS Division of Extramural Research and Training (DERT), co-led the committee that proposed the new group.

Inflammation is an immune system response that can be normal and restorative, or can result in tissue injury and, ultimately, disease. Diseases that involve inflammation, particularly neurologic, cardiopulmonary, neoplastic, reproductive, metabolic, and autoimmune, are increasing in prevalence and severity, resulting in significant public health costs. Evidence is growing that the environment plays an important role in triggering inflammatory response.

### Assessing the state of research

"Through the faculty, we can work together to explore what different groups in the Institute are doing, enhance transdivisional research, and support a workshop of experts from government, academia, and industry to promote research on environmentally-associated inflammation," explained Miller, who participated by conference call from his office in Bethesda, Md.

Allen stressed the cross-divisional nature of the faculty. "With representatives from each division, we are planning for a workshop in spring 2015 to focus on the gaps in knowledge and how best to fill them."

Mike Humble, Ph.D., health scientist administrator in DERT, presented a possible workshop model for the group's consideration, based on his own experience designing and leading an expert panel on autoimmune diseases (see [story](#)).

Following Humble's talk, the group entered into a lively conversation about mission and goal statements. They also discussed a divisional review of activities related to inflammation, a portfolio analysis of current grants on the topic, and hosting talks on current research by NIEHS and other experts. These ideas helped lay the groundwork for upcoming meetings currently planned on a quarterly basis.

Later, Andy Rooney, Ph.D., deputy director of the Office of Health Assessment and Translation, emphasized the goal of broad representation in the group. "It is not too late to become part of this," Rooney said. NIEHS and NTP staff should contact a member of the faculty leadership for more information. Allen is principal coordinator, and co-coordinators include Caroline Dilworth, Ph.D., Mike Humble, Ph.D., Fred Miller, M.D., Ph.D., Sri Nadadur, Ph.D., and Andy Rooney, Ph.D.



*"Inflammation was chosen as one of the priority areas thought to be important in a wide variety of processes and impacting a large number of activities in the Institute," said Allen, who led the meeting. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*Miller's clinical research group seeks to understand the development of a number of autoimmune diseases characterized by chronic inflammation. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*Humble presented a workshop model he used successfully in the past, for consideration by the faculty as it plans its 2015 workshop. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*Mike Fessler, M.D., left, head of the Clinical Investigation of Host Defense Group, and Jonathan Hollander, Ph.D., health scientist administrator in DERT, both participated in the kickoff meeting. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*

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