

The Netherlands, India enter brain research deal

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Spearheaded by AIIMS and supported by DBT, Unique project on brain diseases



The union minister of science and technology and earth sciences, Mr S Jaipal Reddy and minister of health welfare and sports, government of the Netherlands, Ms Edlth Schippers on January 30, 2013, launched a unique project to be conducted by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, and supported by the department of biotechnology (DBT) and its institute at Manesar (Haryana), the National Brain Research Centre, Gurgaon.

Speaking on the occasion Mr Jaipal Reddy said, through this process we hope, not only to help people at risk but also define known or novel risk factors that place people at risk of developing health problems mainly related to brain. He expressed hope that this project will serve as a model and training ground for similar initiatives of other parts of our huge and diverse country.

Ms Edith Schippers said the Erasmus University Medical Centre has committed to provide training and intellectual inputs to people who will work in this project.

The secretary, DBT, Dr K Vijayraghawan said this project is designed to serve as a unique model in the sense that instead of usual practice of people seeking help for cure of their diseases at AIIMS, it is the AIIMS which in this project will seek people at risk to prevent diseases. The project focuses on people above 50 years of age in one rural and one urban area. Social Workers will screen people in the adopted areas, invite them to AIIMS even if they have no symptoms, assess the health of their brain, heart and blood, ask their food habits; give them necessary advice and follow them 6-monthly on phone and physically every three years. The project's underpinning is the oft quoted axiom "Prevention is better than cure", he added.

Dr M C Mishra, director of AIIMS said that the institute stands to gain from this collaboration with the Netherland's experience on running world- famous similar study at Rotterdam for last 25 years with over 1000 research papers. He said AIIMS plans to use data so generated to conduct several research projects to derive new knowledge that will help the country to develop preventive strategies.

It was specified during the launch that this is a unique project to develop a model and test strategies to prevent stroke and

dementia as well as heart attacks; and hopefully inspire and support other similar projects in India. The Indo-Dutch collaboration capitalizes on the experience of Dutch Scientists who have been running similar projects in their country (Rotterdam study). Netherlands partners also stand to learn from unique cultural characteristics of India, from exchange visits of scientists and research workers and from the new generalizable knowledge that emerges from this study.