

Human genomics symposium begins

Qatar's National Genome Committee is hosting the country's first human genomics symposium which began yesterday at the Qatar National Convention Centre.

The two-day event is discussing Human Genomics and Personalised Medicine - A global overview of challenges and opportunities.

The symposium follows the announcement of the Qatar Genome Project at the World Innovation Summit on Health, last year, by HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development and vice chairperson of the Supreme Council of Health.

The symposium is organised by members of the National Genome Committee and the science and research community. Committee members include Qatar Biobank, Qatar Biomedical Research Institute, Sidra Medical and Research Centre, Hamad Medical Corporation, Qatar Computing Research Institute and Qatar National Research Fund.

The work of the committee is supported by Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, Qatar University, and the Supreme Council of Health. The National Genome Committee is tasked with the role of driving and advising the development of the Qatar Genome Project.

Commenting on the significance of the inaugural symposium, a National Genome Com-



Participants in a panel discussion at the human genomics symposium yesterday.

mittee spokesperson said: "The Qatar Genome Project will chart a roadmap for future treatment through personalised medicine. Genomics and personalised medicine is a rapidly emerging medical discipline and the human genomics symposium is a unique opportunity to exchange the latest knowledge and best practices in genomics research with local, regional and international experts in the field."

With Qatar Biobank set for public launch later this year having collected health information and biological samples from more than 1,500 members of the local community, the human ge-

nomics symposium has brought together international experts to share international best practices which will shed light on how these samples can be used and managed through the Qatar Genome Project.

Dr Abderrahim, managing director, Qatar Biobank, said: "This is why in 2010 we established Qatar Biobank, the largest population-based health initiative ever undertaken in Qatar and the surrounding region. The long-term initiative aims to help improve the lives of future generations by enabling medical research on the causes of prevalent diseases includ-

ing diabetes, obesity, cancer and cardiovascular disease.

"With 17% of Qatari adults suffering from type-2 diabetes, the knowledge collected at Qatar Biobank for the Qatar Genome Project will give scientists a unique insight into the causes, enabling prevention of these diseases and personalised treatments compatible with an individual's genomic coding," he added.

A number of global leaders in genomics are also making presentations at the symposium. They include Prof Ron Davis, professor of biochemistry and genetics and director of the

Stanford Genome Technology Centre; and Dr Jeffrey Gulcher, co-founder and president of Iceland's NextCODE Health, which is similar to the Qatar Genome Project in terms of sample size and participation.

Also participating are representatives from Genomics England and the Estonian Genome Centre. Representatives from the region include Dr Sultan al-Sedairy, of the Saudi Arabian Genome Project; Dr Hamza Abdul Rezzak, scientific co-ordinator at the Centre for Arab Genomic Studies; and Eman Sadoun, head of the department of research at the Supreme Council of Health.