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Byline: Robert Stevenson

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IMPROVER Challenge

Another example of crowd sourcing was in the booth and lecture of sbv IMPROVER (where sbv stands for systems biology verification). sbv IMPROVER is a global collaboration of IBM (Zurich, Switzerland) and funded by PMI (Neuchatel, Switzerland). PMI, once part of Phillip Morris Inc., is very interested in developing tools for toxicity. PMI's vision is that improved tools might facilitate development of reduced-risk tobacco products.

The IMPROVER model is based on the Jeopardy! Challenge, where the massive computing power of Watson was able to outperform two gifted humans to claim the $1 million prize. The first IMPROVER round started in March 2012 with a challenge to find genetic signatures for four data sets that were selected for psoriasis, multiple sclerosis (MS), chronic pulmonary obstructive disease (CPOD), and lung cancer. Results were presented at a meeting in October 2012 and will be published in 2013. In addition to the recognition, the winners will receive $50,000 for research support.

Species Translation, the second challenge, is scheduled to start in Q2 2013 (www.sbvimprover.com/). The goals are: 1) Identify rules that map measurements derived from high-throughput screening (HTS) from one species (mouse, rat, human, etc.) to another; 2) establish limits of species translation; and 3) quantify species translation.

IMPROVER is certainly an innovative and ambitious program. Holding a bake-off with significant monetary and reputation building rewards will attract participation. The financial clout of both sponsors adds to the probability of success. So, best of luck!

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