Strategic Alliances in Neuroscience

GLADYS E. MAESTRE*

Dept. of Neuroscience, Universidad del Zulia, Maracaibo Zulia, Venezuela

Conducting neuroscience research in developing countries offers a wide range of exciting possibilities as well as some specific challenges. Altruism is the primary motivation for future neuroscientists. However, people who choose neuroscience as their field of endeavor face a special burden because neural problems are not high on the list of public health priorities, little funding is available, the public does not pressure government agencies and research institutions to solve these problems, researchers are widely dispersed and often secretive about their work, and local graduate programs that provide training in the field are lacking. To compensate for these difficulties, the successful researcher searches for creative solutions such as strategic alliances similar to those that have proved to be so successful for businesses throughout the world. Strategic alliances can be defined as partnerships involving two or more teams that share resources and information to their mutual benefit. Potential allies include not only government agencies, the public, the media, private capitals, excellence centers, clinicians and other researchers but researcher’s families as well. Partners in a strategic alliance must engage in a consistent process of reliable quality and proven efficiency. They must be open to the use of new technology and be prepared to look at the particular research problem they are dedicated to solving with a fresh eye. They also need to assemble a highly productive team that includes managers who are willing to measure real results, share credit, appreciate the “big picture,” and take risks. Scientists who decide to establish a strategic alliance should begin with a definite goal in mind, engage in a proactive search of partners, examine alternative approaches for achieving the goal, select the approach that holds the most promise, position their team and technology accordingly, and finally agree to complete the research within a clear time frame and budget. Although strategic alliances are not for everyone, our experience with a program titled “Toward a Multicausal Interpretation of Aging,” carried out in Maracaibo-Venezuela, supports the notion that strategic alliances greatly improve the chances of conducting successful neuroscience research in developing countries.

*e-mail: (gem6@telcel.net.ve)