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PRESS RELEASE

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**POWERFUL MARKET FORCES OVER-RULE SCIENCE ETHICS, SAYS
NOBEL LAUREATE**

In an era when science and biology are being so productive, the ethics of research and how it is used are being undermined by the power of market forces, according to Nobel Prize Winner, Dr Sir John Sulston. “Science is vulnerable to the influence of industry, and marketing needs can be in direct conflict with unbiased medical information and education,” he said today (20 July) at BioScience2004 in Glasgow.

His own recent experience comes from the struggle to ensure that the information from the Human Genome Project and other genomes was made fully public. “This particular case illustrates the general importance of public databases, and the consequent need for revenue for such public research,” said Dr Sulston from the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute in Cambridge.

Dr Sulston, is one of a minority of academic scientists who are prepared to speak out in protest against the dominance of the market in controlling the way therapies are selected, approved and promoted. “The consequence is a plethora of treatments for those who can pay, and a dearth for those who cannot – especially in developing countries and in countries that do not have effective national systems of healthcare,” he said.

Government rightly endeavours to save public money by encouraging private investment. But because international trading is driven by market forces to the exclusion of other considerations, there is a danger that science and medicine will sink to the lowest ethical level, he believes.

He went on to say, “In science there is a distinction between discovery and the application of research. We need bodies such as the National Institute for Clinical

Excellence and the Human Genetics Commission to act as gatekeepers, nationally and globally.”

Ethical issues and questions that arise from advances in medicine and science, such as the use of genetic information in society, must be given the highest priority on the international research funding agenda. “We are dealing with human life. It is hard to see how humanity can proceed to a more equitable and secure world unless we modify the rules,” Dr Sulston concluded.

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Notes to Editors

BioScience2004 is hosted by the Biochemical Society – www.biochemistry.org

Dr Sir John Sulston was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2002 for his discoveries of genetic regulation. Following publication of the first draft sequence of the human genome in 2000 he was listed among the UK's 100 most powerful people by the Observer newspaper. Sir John received his knighthood for services to genome research in the 2001 New Year's Honours. Formerly the director of the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, he continues to work there.

The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, which receives the majority of its funding from the Wellcome Trust, was founded in 1992 as the focus for UK sequencing efforts. The Institute is responsible for the completion of the sequence of approximately one-third of the human genome as well as genomes of model organisms such as mouse and zebrafish, and more than 90 pathogen genomes. In October 2001, new funding was awarded by the Wellcome Trust to support a new range of post-genomic programmes designed to understand the biological function of genes and their relevance to our health. These programmes are built around a Faculty of more than 30 senior researchers.
<http://www.sanger.ac.uk>