

# Historical overview : from LMB to DMBR to IRC

**Walter FIERS** founded the Laboratory of Molecular Biology (LMB) at Ghent University (UGent). From those early days, an impressive collection of scientific contributions to molecular biomedicine was generated by his team, which grew steadily both in size and expertise. The highlights of that nascent era of life sciences in Flanders, notably in the Laboratory of Molecular Biology at Ghent University, included determination of the first complete genome sequence of an animal virus, i.e. the tumor virus SV40 (1978), and later on cloning and functional analysis of several human cytokines (interferon- $\beta$ , interferon- $\gamma$  and IL-2). With the growing experience in mammalian cell cultivation and in oncogenic viruses, further research became largely focused on the molecular biology of cancer, and more specifically on the possibility of using molecular cell and gene technologies to develop new approaches for improved diagnosis as well as therapies.



After 1985, research focused more specifically on tumor necrosis factor (TNF), which has the remarkable property, especially when combined with interferon- $\gamma$ , of killing many types of tumor cells. Presently, it is successfully used in the clinic for locoregional therapy. But TNF is also a potent inflammatory cytokine, leading to sepsis-like shock and other pathologies. Improving the therapeutic potential of TNF required a detailed molecular knowledge of its mechanism of action at the levels of protein structure, cell biology, and in vivo behavior. Moreover, its cytotoxic action contributed to the unraveling of the molecular mechanism of apoptosis, an important and rapidly evolving research domain that was also successfully explored at the LMB.

In 1995, the Government of Flanders decided to found a new Research Institute: [VIB \(Flanders Institute for Biotechnology\)](#). The scientific mission of VIB was the establishment of an autonomous interuniversity structure to create in Flanders a stable and stimulating environment for high-quality basic research in life sciences, particularly in biotechnology. Other important objectives of the VIB were training of expert molecular biotechnologists, technology transfer of proprietary findings, and stimulation of a scientifically well-informed social dialogue on biotechnology. The Laboratory of Molecular Biology at Ghent University became the **VIB-Department of Molecular Biology (DMB)**, and received its first grant for the period 1995-2000. Other VIB departments at Ghent University are the [Department of Plant Systems Biology](#) (Dir.: Prof. Dirk INZE), and the [Department of Medical Protein Chemistry](#) (Dir.: Prof. Joel VANDEKERCKHOVE).

In 1997, Walter FIERS retired as scientific director of the Department of Molecular Biology and was succeeded as a scientific director by **Frans VAN ROY**.

Because of its activities in molecular biomedical research, the department was correspondingly renamed **Department of Molecular Biomedical Research (DMBR)** in 2002.

In 2003, the DMBR moved into the **new UGent-VIB research building**.

VIB and the DMBR were successfully evaluated in 2006 and 2011. As a result, the Government of Flanders approved a third management agreement for the period 2012-2016.

Since 1-Jan-2012, the DMBR is headed by the departmental director, **Bart LAMBRECHT**, who is further focusing the research on unraveling the mechanisms of inflammation and immunity.

In September 2013, the Department was therefore renamed **Inflammation Research Center (IRC)**. From January 1, 2017 on the Inflammation Research Center is called VIB-UGent Center for Inflammation Research.



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