U.S. starts historic cancer genome project

December 14 2005

The U.S. government is starting one of the largest genetic research projects in history: the categorization of all genes involved in cancer.

The Cancer Genome Atlas, with a total final cost of at least $1 billion, will sort all of the hundreds of genes involved in turning healthy cells into carcinomas, potentially leading to more effective treatments, The Washington Post reported.

The National Cancer Institute will contribute half the cost of the $200 million pilot project, with the National Human Genome Research Institute funding the other half, the New York Times said.

By identifying all of the genetic errors that allow carcinomas to develop, scientists hope to be able to classify every cancer and identify which drugs will work and which ones will not, the Post said.

"The future will look no more like the past than a butterfly resembles a caterpillar," NCI Director Andrew von Eschenbach told reporters, adding he sees cancer devolving soon from a killer disease to a "chronic, manageable condition."