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SPECIAL ISSUE Clues to long noncoding RNA taxonomy

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This special issue aims to assemble available knowledge on long noncoding RNAs (IncRNAs) and provide future research directions for discovering the molecular functions of this emerging family of molecules. The genomes of eukaryotes, particularly mammalian species including human and mouse, possess large chunks of nonprotein-coding regions. Only 2% of the human genome is dedicated to coding for proteins; the remainder is constituted of noncoding regions, which are for the most part functionally unannotated. At the beginning of the postgenomic era, transcriptome genome-wide analyses in various organisms unexpectedly revealed that large portions of the mammalian genome produce numerous transcripts that lack protein-coding potential. Among these RNAs, noncoding transcripts longer than 200 nt are arbitrary referred to as "IncRNAs". As in the case of proteins, ncRNAs are extremely diverse and have specific characteristics that determine their functions. However, IncRNAs have been collectively and passively defined as RNA molecules without polypeptide-coding capacity, with no consideration for their functions. However, it is now broadly accepted that a certain subset of IncRNAs possess

specific regulatory functions that control a wide range of physiological events. In light of this, it is the time to establish a new classification, which we tentatively call "IncRNA taxonomy", which classifies IncRNAs into functional groups according to the type(s) of function-conferring RNA element(s) they possess. This approach should make it possible to predict the functions of unannotated IncRNAs and improve our understanding of their biological significance. In this special issue, we have assembled as much information as possible to provide "clues to IncRNA taxonomy", including clues about their genomic organization, expression, processing, structure, chemical modifications, and interacting factors, as well as their molecular and physiological functions and putative involvement in various diseases.

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