A Brief Look at Obama's Brain-Mapping Project

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On April 2, President Obama announced a $100 million public-private initiative to uncover the mysteries of the brain. The program's mission includes learning more about how people think and remember, becoming more knowledgeable about diseases and finding better ways to treat illnesses ranging from autism to schizophrenia, according to a media report from the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF).

The Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) initiative is a collaboration between academic institutions and federal agencies in neurotechnology, neurosciences and neurology. The initiative will be led by Cornelia Bargmann, PhD, a former UCSF professor, and William Newsome, PhD, of Stanford University.

The BRAIN initiative seeks to develop techniques for recording or imaging brain activity, then to figure out how to understand these patterns and eventually be able to manipulate brain activity patterns and repair dysfunctional brain circuits.

BRAIN is similar to the Human Genome Project, a 13-year initiative that produced billions of dollars in economic activity and a huge supply of data currently used in biomedical research. Data from the brain mapping initiative would generate more laboratory research and clinical care, and it would help identify patients at higher risk for hospitalization.

"We have a chance to improve the lives of not just millions, but billions of people on this planet through the research that's done in this BRAIN Initiative alone," Obama said. "But it's going to require a serious effort, a sustained effort."

The six scientists who worked on the concept of the brain-mapping project said that the initiative will enable doctors to accurately diagnose and restore normal patterns of activity to injured or diseased brains. In addition, the researchers suggested that brain-mapping data would also trigger the development of broader biomedical and environmental applications and generate many associated economic benefits.

To read more about brain-related diseases, click here.

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