Kotak Elected HHMI Vice President and Chief Financial Officer

The HHMI Board of Trustees has elected Nitin Kotak as the Institute’s next vice president of finance and chief financial officer. Kotak, 53, joins HHMI from Technest Holdings, Inc., where he was chief financial officer and treasurer. He succeeds Edward J. Palmerino, who had held the post since 2006.

“Nitin comes to us with great enthusiasm for our mission and significant experience in financial analysis, reporting, and compliance,” says Cheryl Moore, HHMI’s executive vice president and chief operating officer. “He is a strong addition to our management team and we’re pleased to welcome him to the Institute.”

A native of India, Kotak received a bachelor of commerce degree from the University of Calcutta, where he graduated with first class honors in accounting and auditing. He spent more than 17 years working in a variety of finance-related positions at ITC Limited, the Indian associate of the Fortune 500 company British American Tobacco. He has also worked at India-based Mattel Toys, a subsidiary of Mattel, Inc., and Able Laboratories, Inc., a developer and manufacturer of generic pharmaceuticals.

In 2005, Kotak joined Technest, located in Bethesda, Maryland, as vice president for finance and operations and became chief financial officer and treasurer in 2008. Technest provides advanced sensor technologies and services to the National Institutes of Health as well as national defense, homeland security, military, and intelligence agencies.

At HHMI, Kotak will oversee budget and financial analysis, the controller’s office, treasury, internal audit, and procurement. “I am very excited at this opportunity to be a part of this outstanding organization and work in a spirit of giving back to the community,” says Kotak. “I feel honored to be selected for this great responsibility.”

Kotak also serves as president of the Maryland-based Washington Kali Temple, an Indian religious and cultural center. He and his wife, Dipti, live in Silver Spring and have two sons. Kotak remains a senior member of three major professional institutes in India—the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Institute of Company Secretaries, and the Institute of Cost and Works Accountants.

Summer Institute Expands with HHMI Support

Michelle Withers’ first years of teaching were frustrating. “I had been trying to learn how to teach better, but I didn’t know what to do,” says Withers, now a biology professor at West Virginia University.

Then she went to the National Academies Summer Institute for Undergraduate Education in Biology, a week-long course that shows faculty better ways to teach. It changed her life. Withers was so excited by what she learned that she started her own local version of the training program. “I really drank the Kool-Aid,” she says.

Now the Summer Institute is expanding to allow more educators to learn the techniques behind successful teaching. What started as a single site in Wisconsin will include up to nine regional training centers across the country over the next five years, with the help of $3 million provided by HHMI. Four new training sites will start up this summer in New Haven, Seattle, Boulder, and Minneapolis.

“The Summer Institute is very successful, but at the rate it was going it would never reach enough faculty,” says Sean B. Carroll, HHMI’s vice president for science education. “With this expansion, we hope to greatly increase the number of faculty members who participate and bring what they learn back to their campuses. The scale of this effort is aimed at changing biology teaching across the country.”

The expanded Summer Institute will continue to use the National Academy of Sciences’ Bio2010 report as a touchstone. The report concluded that biology faculty needed to learn the science behind successful teaching. “People have a strong tendency to teach the way they were taught,” says Jo Handelsman at Yale University, who co-leads the Summer Institute with Bill Wood at the University of Colorado, Boulder. “But we know that lectures are the worst way to teach if you care about student learning.”

At the Summer Institute, faculty learn how to incorporate active-learning techniques, including interactive projects and discussion groups with constant assessment. They also learn how to make it work in a large lecture-style classroom. Since 2004, 304 faculty and instructional staff members from 94 institutions have gone through the Summer Institute. Its graduates teach approximately 100,000 undergraduates each year.