

7 June 2004

Major Boost for Stem Cell Research

In a major initiative designed to accelerate global research efforts, Australia's Biotechnology Centre of Excellence, the National Stem Cell Centre (NSCC) today announced it plans to collaborate with biotechnology company Stem Cell Sciences Ltd (SCS) to allow the development and distribution of new human embryonic stem (ES) cell lines to scientists around the world.

Based on a Heads of Agreement that has been reached, the new lines of stem cells will be obtained from Melbourne IVF clinics by SCS, subject to the issue of an appropriate NHMRC license as required by Australian law. It is hoped that six new lines will be developed over a two year period.

Both the NSCC and SCS will then use the new human ES cell lines to accelerate their own research programs which focus on significant illnesses with limited treatments.

"The aim of the NSCC's research programs is to develop both embryonic stem cell and adult stem cell technologies that will provide human therapeutics for blood and heart diseases," NSCC Chief Executive Officer Dr Hugh Niall said.

Dr Niall explained the significance of the move: "Embryonic stem cells have enormous potential to be used in the treatment of a wide variety of diseases such as heart failure, neurodegenerative disorders and cancer. However, very few reliable human ES cell lines are available to researchers. Those that do exist often come with intellectual property encumbrances."

Importantly, the NSCC and SCS have agreed to make these new human ES cell lines available to the international scientific community without intellectual property obligations. "We hope that this initiative will stimulate new research efforts in Australia and overseas and eventually lead to major medical advances," Dr Niall said.

David Newton, SCS General Manager Australia, added: "Providing unencumbered human ES cell lines to researchers will facilitate stem cell research and the development of regenerative medicine in Australia and internationally."

SCS CEO Dr Peter Mountford said that while the company was committed to furthering scientific research in the field, it was also committed to using its suite of patented technologies with the new cell lines, in partnerships with companies and research institutes, for new discoveries in the fields of drug discovery, cell culture media and cell therapies.

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“Our collaboration with the NSCC highlights our desire to work with international centres of excellence,” he said.

The NSCC will make the stem cell lines available through its Major National Research Facility (MNRF) Division, an Australian and Victorian Government funded initiative to provide stem cell researchers with facilities and training to enhance and accelerate their research programs.

Australia is in a unique position to advance the progression of the global stem cell research effort, possessing some of the world’s leading scientists in the fields of embryonic and adult stem cells, tissue repair and immunology. Australian state and federal governments fund research which uses new and existing embryonic stem cell lines.

Australian Government legislation provides a nationally consistent framework for all research involving human embryos. The legislative framework is supported by national ethics guidelines.

National Stem Cell Centre

Australia’s National Stem Cell Centre (NSCC) (<http://www.nscce.edu.au>) is a major collaborative initiative uniting many of Australia’s leading academic researchers to develop innovative therapeutic products to treat a range of serious injuries and debilitating diseases.

It was formed out of the ‘Backing Australia’s Ability’ initiative of the Australian Government as Australia’s Biotechnology Centre of Excellence and also benefits from a supporting grant from the Victorian State government under its Science, Technology and Innovation program. The Australian Government recently announced that the NSCC would receive funding through to 2011.

Stem Cell Sciences Limited

SCS is a world-leading stem cell company with patented technologies for the growth, differentiation and purification of ES cells. It has facilities affiliated with Centres of Stem Cell Excellence in Melbourne, Edinburgh and Kobe. SCS is expanding its research efforts in all three centres to create new drug discovery evaluations, cell culture media and cell based medicines.

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