



Stem Cells for Safer Medicines

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EMBARGO: Not for use before 00.01am, Wednesday, October 3, 2007

GROUNDBREAKING UK STEM CELL PARTNERSHIP LAUNCHED

A new initiative to use stem cells for safety testing of potential new medicines was launched today. Marking its official inauguration, Stem Cells for Safer Medicines (SC4SM) called for proposals from research partners interested in developing techniques to use stem cells for early safety testing of new medicines.

Stem Cells for Safer Medicines, an independent, not-for-profit company has been founded via a consortium attracting both public and industry investment, including three major international pharmaceutical companies - GlaxoSmithKline, AstraZeneca and Roche. Initiated by the Department of Health (DH) and led by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI), the company is also supported by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), the Scottish Government, the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).

In welcoming the initiative, science minister Ian Pearson said "I am delighted to announce the launch of this exciting new initiative. It is a core part of the Governments 10 year strategy for stem cell research in the UK.

This collaboration between Government and pharmaceutical companies is an excellent example not only of our commitment to stem cell research but also our commitment to work in partnership with industry to speed the development of safer medicines."

The initiative brings together scientific expertise in stem cell research and medicines safety assessment, to provide guidance and funding for academic research. Its aim is to overcome scientific hurdles and establish open standards and techniques for how stem cells may be used for medicine safety testing.

By working across the academic and industrial science community the partnership will share these discoveries to enable consistency in this pre-competitive research. This work will help to identify potential side-effects much earlier in the research process, before animal and human trials are carried out. The initiative will not be looking into the therapeutic potential of stem cells themselves.

The call for proposals launched today is the first phase of a five-year programme, and seeks to address particular hurdles in the differentiation of liver cells from existing stem cell lines. In parallel, an independent scientific advisory board, chaired by Dr Glyn Stacey, will provide advice and map out the longer-term scientific programme.

As a new area of science that raises public concerns, the partnership is set up to operate under a clear ethical framework. The partnership will operate in accordance with the standards established by UK Stem Cell Bank and will only use ethically sourced stem cell lines already banked, or registered to be banked, in the facilities. In early 2008, an independent ethical advisory board will be established to audit and review the policy and advise its membership.

“There is huge potential for stem cell technology to improve medicines development, but major scientific hurdles to realise the opportunities remain. As scientists we carry a responsibility to society to ensure this technology is used responsibly,” said Dr Philip Wright, ABPI Director of Science & Technology and Chief Executive of Stem Cells for Safer Medicines.

“This partnership takes advantage of the UK’s position in this emerging science, brings together stem cell and medicine safety scientists, and also facilitates participation from companies in Europe and the rest of the world. If successful, it will have a real impact on improving safety in clinical studies and ultimately for patients.”

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For further information about SC4SM, please contact:

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