



MEDIA RELEASE
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International effort to answer stem cell questions

Stem cell research still poses more questions than answers. What are the potential applications of stem cell research? How can we grow stem cells and control their development? What are the ethical and legal implications of working with human stem cells? A gathering of close to 300 stem cell experts will address these questions at a conference in Milan this week, in the hope of moving closer to the answers required to take stem cell research to the clinic.

This international conference on Advances in Stem Cell Research, organised by the European Consortium for Stem Cell Research (EuroStemCell) and the University of Milano, and supported by Fondazione Cariplo, BioRep and Sapio Industrie, takes a well-rounded look at an often polarising topic. Scientists will compare their work on embryonic, foetal and adult stem cells. Clinical applications and ethical issues - both key considerations for stem cell researchers - will also be discussed.

Presentations from patient groups begin the conference with a reminder that stem cell research has the potential to offer treatment for serious and devastating diseases. Conference organiser, Professor Elena Cattaneo of the University of Milano, says "we are delighted to have representatives from the Duchenne Parent Project, the Luca Coscioni Association and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International at this conference and involved in our work. Stem cell research is seen by many as both abstract and ethically complex, but to sufferers from diseases like Parkinson's and muscular dystrophies it offers real hope."

On the back of a lively and successful Brussels workshop on the ethics of stem cell banking, this conference features a dedicated ethics session. Session Chair, Professor Göran Hermerén of Sweden's Lund University, says: "stem cell research raises many fundamental ethical questions. Open discussion of these questions at conferences like this can only be positive for policy, legislation, the public and for science itself."

The conference follows EuroStemCell's annual consortium meeting, in Bellagio, (Como, Italy), and marks the end of the EU-funded project's first year. Professor Austin Smith, Director of the University of Edinburgh's Institute for Stem Cell Research, heads the EuroStemCell consortium and comments: "only through collaboration will we advance research from the laboratory to the clinic. Our Europe-wide consortium allows us to compare scientific developments across different types of stem cells. The more we understand about these cells and their behaviour, the closer we come to developing their therapeutic potential to treat diseases."

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Notes to Editors:

Full conference programme can be downloaded from <http://www.eurostemcell.org/>

EuroStemCell is a four-year Integrated Project of the European Union's Sixth Framework Programme, and will receive up to €11.9 million in funding from the EU. The 14 participants are from Scotland, England, Sweden, France, Denmark, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. They comprise universities, research institutes and 3 biotechnology companies. EuroStemCell's mission is to build the scientific foundations required to take stem cell technology to the clinic.

European Union's Sixth Framework Programme (FP6). The Framework Programme is the main European instrument for research funding in Europe. FP6 aims to contribute to a true 'European Research Area' (ERA). At the Lisbon summit in March 2000, EU governments called for a better use of European research efforts through the creation of an internal market for science and technology – a 'European Research Area'. FP6 is the financial instrument to help make ERA a reality.

BioRep in collaboration with Coriell Institute for Medical Research (www.coriell.org) provides global bio-bank services to the scientific community worldwide.
www.biorep.it

Fondazione Cariplo

Based in Lombardy, Fondazione Cariplo promotes science and society, and is one of Italy's most active Foundations.
<http://www.fondazione-cariplo.it/>

Duchenne Parent Project

An organisation set up by parents of young people with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy – a severe and progressive muscle wasting disease - to find a cure or treatment for this disease.

Luca Coscioni Association

An Italian association of doctors, physicians, researchers and patients, set up in 2002 to advocate a change in Italian and international policies relating to freedom of scientific research.

<http://www.lucacoscioni.it/cms/english/who.php>

Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF)

Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) is the leading charitable funder and advocate of juvenile (type 1) diabetes research worldwide. The mission of JDRF is to find a cure for diabetes and its complications through the support of research.

<http://www.jdrf.org/>

JDRF supports EuroStemCell's collaboration with the European Consortium for Beta Cell Therapy, a Sixth Framework project investigating the possibilities of cell programming for the development of new clinical applications in the treatment of diabetes.

Stem cells glossary

Stem Cell - unspecialized cell that has the ability to multiply without limit, and can also give rise to specialized cell types in the body.

Embryonic stem cell - Stem cells originating from the early embryo that have the potential to make most cell types both in the body and in the laboratory.

Foetal Stem Cell - Tissue stem cells originating from the foetus that have the potential to make a limited range of specialised cell types.

Adult stem cell - Tissue stem cells taken from adults (i.e. bone marrow, skin, muscle etc.). Tissue stem cells are undifferentiated cells found in a specialized tissue. They have the ability to make a limited range of specialised cell types.

Regenerative medicine - It is hoped that stem cells will be able to replace/replenish tissue that has been diseased or damaged. For example, in Parkinson's disease for which there is no effective current cure, it is hoped that stem cells will be able to replenish the damaged nerve cells.

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List all participants:

University of Edinburgh (Scotland), Lund University (Sweden), Institut Pasteur (France), Karolinska Institute (Sweden), Milano Hospital SCRI (Italy), Milano University (Italy), EMBL-Monterondo (Italy), University of Bonn Medical Center (Germany), Cancer Research UK (England), Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute (England), Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (Switzerland), Stem Cell Sciences UK Ltd (Scotland), NsGene A/S (Denmark), NeuroNova (Sweden)