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NY awards \$14.5 million for stem-cell research

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State officials announced today \$14.5 million in grants to medical institutions for stem-cell research, the first allocation of a planned \$600 million in aid to expand the research in New York.

In the initial round of funding, 25 institutions across New York received between \$100,000 and \$1 million to purchase equipment, continue research or provide training to scientists in the rapidly growing stem-cell research industry.

Cornell University and the University of Rochester's School of Medicine were among the institutions receiving \$1 million grants. Others include New York City-based Columbia University Medical Center, Memorial Sloan Kettering Institute for Cancer Research and Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

The announcement calls for providing statewide \$6.1 million for direct stem-cell research, \$7.4 million for infrastructure, and \$1 million for training.

Eight months ago, Gov. Eliot Spitzer and Lt. Gov. David Paterson created a stem-cell research initiative as part of the current 2007-08 budget. The state plans to spend at least \$600 million on stem-cell research over the next dec

Spitzer said that states have had to step in to fund stem-cell research because the federal government has failed to do so. President Bush has twice vetoed legislation that would provide public funding for embryonic stem-cell research.

Spitzer said that the work will put New York "at the forefront of research arenas that will not only keep us a medical capital of the world, but also provide cures, we hope, for some of the most difficult and nagging diseases that we have been unable to confront over time."

Stem cells, the primal cells of the body, have the potential to develop into different cell types, and researchers are looking for ways to manipulate the cells to help treat conditions ranging from diabetes to spinal-cord injury.

"These grants will be used to support research that improves and saves the lives of New Yorkers and Americans across the country every day," said Susan Solomon, head of the New York Stem Cell Foundation.

New York's fund will pay for research using stem cells taken from embryos, as well as stem cells taken from adult tissue. No grants will be allowed for research involving human cloning. An ethics panel reviews all grant applications to ensure the funding requests comply with state standards, officials said.

With the lack of federal action, states have adopted their own standards for stem-cell research, as well as their own funding streams.

New York currently is making the second-largest contribution to stem cell research among the states. California voters passed a \$3 billion stem cell referendum in 2004.

But Paterson said that New York's quick release of grants means the state expects to be fastest in providing direct money to institutions.

A funding committee of the Empire State Stem Cell Board met today to approve the grants.

The money went to not-for-profit research institutions in New York that received at least \$1 million in biomedical funding in 2006 from the National Institutes of Health or the National Science Foundation.

A second round of funding is expected later this year.

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