



The UK and California announce an international collaboration to advance stem cell research

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The Medical Research Council and the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM), the state's stem cell agency, have announced an international collaboration on stem cell research.

The agreement was signed today by the UK's Minister for Science, Lord Drayson, and the chairman of the governing board of CIRM, Robert N. Klein.

CIRM and the MRC are laying the foundation for joint UK-California research to advance stem cell therapies for treatment of some of the most debilitating diseases. As stem cell research progresses toward clinical application, both CIRM and the MRC are funding more translational and disease-focused research. Such research benefits greatly from the sort of multidisciplinary collaborations that the agreement will promote. The agreement will make it easier for researchers in California and the UK to obtain joint funding to broaden the potential pool of expertise that can be applied toward research in a specific area. It is expected that researchers on both sides of the Atlantic will form teams that will apply jointly for funding through a process that builds upon routine CIRM / MRC procedures. For those that are approved, CIRM will fund the California researchers and the MRC will fund the UK researchers.

Lord Drayson said: "The UK is a world leader in stem cell science, with its strong research base in stem cells and developmental biology. By forging collaborations with California, we can bring together the best minds across continents to accelerate the search for cures and the development of stem cell-based therapies, for the benefit of people around the world."

CIRM and the MRC are planning a conference with leading scientists in the field discussing the most fruitful options for collaboration in January 2009. This follows a meeting hosted by the UK in 2006 and discussions in San Francisco earlier this year which developed some of the initial thinking behind the new agreement.

Dr Alan Trounson, President of CIRM said: "One of CIRM's primary goals is to accelerate the field of stem cell research as a whole and in some instances we can do this more effectively through collaborations that involve the best scientific endeavors, regardless of geography. Through this relationship, CIRM money

will continue to be earmarked only for research that takes place within California, but we can expand and advance our overall efforts by co-ordinating our work with other world leaders such as the UK."

Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, Chief Executive of the MRC, said: "The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine and the MRC share the ambition of devising new treatments for currently incurable diseases using the promise of stem cell research. The joint effort we are launching will make CIRM researchers key partners of stem cell scientists here in the UK. By working closely together we have every reason to hope that we will be able to realise the full potential of stem cell research and bring breakthroughs to the clinic more quickly."

Robert Klein, CIRM chairman, said: "This launches a conduit for collaboration between California and the United Kingdom that should dramatically increase the quantity and quality of already strong scientific alliances. Our goal is to shorten the time that it takes to drive discoveries into the clinic and to patients and one way to do this is by extending collaborations such as this. Researchers in the UK have shown leadership in pushing stem cell therapies to the clinic, such as the retina repair work of Chris Mason and Pete Coffey that is already curing blindness in large animal models."

Julian Evans, British Consul General in San Francisco, said: "The MRC – CIRM stem cell alliance builds on growing links between California and the UK. Earlier this year our Science and Innovation team initiated a programme of collaboration development awards, funded by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to facilitate joint work between UK and US stem cell researchers. We are also partnering with the University of California and Canada to host a major stem cell technology transfer event in San Francisco in April '09, which will showcase emerging stem cell therapies and tools – and will help move treatments into the clinic and to the patient."

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Notes:

CIRM was established in 2005 with the passage of Proposition 71, the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Act. The statewide ballot measure, which provided \$3 billion in funding for stem cell research at California universities and research institutions, was overwhelmingly approved by voters, and called for the establishment of an entity to make grants and provide loans for stem cell research, research facilities, and other vital research opportunities. To date, the CIRM governing board has approved 229 research and facility grants totaling more than \$614 million, making CIRM the largest source of funding for human embryonic stem cell research in the world. For more information, please visit www.cirm.ca.gov