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MARIUS WERNIG RECEIVES NEW YORK STEM CELL FOUNDATION – ROBERTSON STEM CELL PRIZE

NEW YORK, NY (October 14, 2014) – The New York Stem Cell Foundation (NYSCF) announced today that Marius Wernig, PhD, Associate Professor in the Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine and the Department of Pathology at Stanford University School of Medicine, is the 2014 recipient of the NYSCF – Robertson Stem Cell Prize, which has been awarded since 2011 for extraordinary achievements in translational stem cell research by a young scientist.

Dr. Wernig and his team discovered that human skin cells can be converted directly into functional neurons, termed induced neuronal (iN) cells, in a period of four to five weeks with the addition of just four proteins.

"Dr. Wernig's groundbreaking research has the potential to accelerate all research on devastating neurodegenerative diseases," said Susan L. Solomon, CEO and Co-founder of NYSCF. "His work can impact and accelerate research on multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, and autism among many other conditions."

At Stanford, Dr. Wernig focuses on using induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells and iN cells for disease modeling and as potential cellular therapy. This new technique transformed the field of cellular reprogramming by eliminating the need to first create iPS cells, making it easier to generate patient or disease-specific neurons. These cell types hold tremendous therapeutic and translational relevance for patients around the world. Potential applications range from replacing damaged brain tissue to repairing the myelinating nerves lost in multiple sclerosis to identifying novel drugs and treatments for a range of neurological diseases.

In addition to his recent scientific achievements, Dr. Wernig was part of the inaugural class of NYSCF – Robertson Stem Cell Investigators in 2010, and is the first NYSCF – Robertson Investigator to receive the NYSCF – Robertson Stem Cell Prize.

"I am delighted that Dr. Wernig is being recognized with this year's NYSCF – Robertson Prize for his important research that has opened entirely new avenues for studying brain diseases. The NYSCF – Robertson Prize was created to acknowledge the most important work being down by young stem cell scientists and I am thrilled to see a NYSCF – Robertson Investigator go on to receive NYSCF – Robertson Prize," said Julian Robertson, whose foundation underwrites the $200,000 prize. The terms of the prize require that the $200,000 stipend be used, at the recipients' discretion, to further support their research.

The NYSCF – Robertson Stem Cell Prize will be presented to Dr. Wernig at a ceremony in New York City by Susan L. Solomon on October 14th.

The jury that selected Dr. Wernig consisted of Fiona Watt, DPhil, from King's College London in the United Kingdom; Lorenz Studer, MD, Director of the Sloan-Kettering Center for Stem Cell Biology; Irving Weissman, MD, Director of the Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine at the Stanford School of Medicine; Amy Wagers, PhD and 2013 NYSCF – Robertson Stem Cell Prize recipient from Harvard University; and Gordon Keller, PhD, McEwen Centre for Regenerative Medicine in Toronto, Canada.

In addition to his work with iN and iPS cells, Dr. Wernig co-leads a CIRM disease team with the goal of developing an iPS cell-based therapy for epidermolysis bullosa, a rare skin disease. Dr. Wernig received his MD and PhD from the Technical University of Munich. He completed his postdoctoral studies at the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Previous recipients of the Robertson Prize include Amy Wagers, PhD, Professor at Harvard University for her work on blood and muscle stem cells; Peter Coffey, DPhil, Director to the London Project to Cure Blindness at University College London for his research on using embryonic stem cells to cure age-related macular degeneration; and Kazutoshi Takahashi, PhD, Lecturer, Center for iPS Cell Research and Application at Kyoto University for his work founding the field of iPS cell research in the laboratory of Dr. Shinya Yamanaka, 2012 Nobel Prize Laureate in Medicine.

In addition to the monetary award, Dr. Wernig will receive an award sculpture designed by celebrated architect Frank Gehry. In 2009, NYSCF honored Gehry with its Humanitarian Award, given to a non-scientist who has been an active advocate of stem cell research.

About The New York Stem Cell Foundation

The New York Stem Cell Foundation (NYSCF) is an independent organization founded in 2005 to accelerate cures and better treatments for patients through stem cell research. NYSCF employs over 45 researchers at the NYSCF Research Institute, located in New York, and is an acknowledged world leader in stem cell research and in developing pioneering stem cell technologies, including the NYSCF Global Stem Cell Array™. Additionally, NYSCF supports another 70 researchers at other leading institutions worldwide through its Innovator Programs, including the NYSCF – Druckenmiller Fellowships and the NYSCF – Robertson Investigator Awards. NYSCF focuses on translational research in a model designed to overcome the barriers that slow discovery and replaces silos with collaboration.

NYSCF researchers have achieved several major discoveries in the field, including: the first diploid stem cell line from a patient with type 1 diabetes using somatic cell nuclear transfer in April 2014; the first stem cell-derived beta cell model that accurately reflects the features of a genetic form of diabetes in June 2013; the generation of functional, immune-matched bone substitutes from patients' skin cells (featured in *The Wall Street Journal* in May 2013); the discovery of a clinical cure to prevent transmission of maternally inherited mitochondrial diseases in December 2012; the derivation of the first-ever patient specific embryonic stem cell line (#1 Medical Breakthrough of 2011 by *Time* magazine); the discovery of a new way to reprogram stem cells; and, the creation of the first disease model from induced pluripotent stem cells (also named the #1 Medical Breakthrough by *Time* magazine in 2008). More information is available at www.nyscf.org.