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BRITISH SCIENTIST WORKING TO CURE COMMON FORM OF BLINDNESS NAMED RECIPIENT OF INAUGURAL NYSCF – ROBERTSON PRIZE IN STEM CELL RESEARCH

*Professor Peter J. Coffey's Stem Cell Therapy for Age-Related Macular Degeneration
Expected to Begin Clinical Trials in 2012*

NEW YORK, NY (October 11, 2011) – The New York Stem Cell Foundation (NYSCF) announced today that a British stem cell scientist working to cure blindness will be the first recipient of The New York Stem Cell Foundation – Robertson Prize in Stem Cell Research, a \$200,000 prize awarded annually for extraordinary achievement in translational stem cell research.

The award will go to Professor Peter J. Coffey, DPhil, Director of the London Project to Cure Blindness and Professor of Cellular Therapy and Visual Sciences at the Institute of Ophthalmology in London, for his pioneering work in the use of human embryonic stem cells to cure Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD), a common form of blindness.

The prize will be presented to Professor Coffey in a ceremony Tuesday evening in New York City by Susan L. Solomon, CEO of The New York Stem Cell Foundation, and Zach W. Hall, former Director of the National Institutes for Health (NIH) National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke and former President of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine.

Professor Coffey's research has demonstrated that stem cell-based therapy halted visual deterioration in models of AMD, a currently untreatable form of blindness affecting millions of people across the globe. Clinical trials using the therapy are expected to begin in 2012.

“The use of stem cells in cell-replacement therapy is expected to dramatically change how we treat degenerative diseases and other chronic conditions,” said Ms. Solomon. “Peter Coffey's seminal research to cure a common form of age-related blindness is a wonderful example of the promise of stem cell science.”

“I congratulate Dr. Coffey and his team on their hard work and commitment to improving the lives of millions afflicted with Age-Related Macular Degeneration,” said Julian H. Robertson, Jr. “The NYSCF – Robertson Stem Cell Prize was created to recognize and support the work of scientists like Dr. Coffey, whose work in stem cell research offers tremendous potential for restoring health and alleviating human suffering.”

“On behalf of the London Project to Cure Blindness team, I am honored to accept this prize,” said Professor Coffey. “This financial award will go directly to support this critical research that offers hope for preventing blindness, restoring sight, and improving the quality of life for sufferers of AMD. I thank The New York Stem Cell Foundation for recognizing this important work and for its support of translational stem cell research.”

Coffey was selected by a jury headed by Douglas A. Melton, PhD, Co-Director of the Harvard Stem Cell Institute and a member of the NYSCF Medical Advisory Board who noted: “The jury was impressed with the high caliber of candidates for this prize and the range of exciting work occurring in stem cell research. We congratulate Professor Coffey and wish him success as his approach to treating Age-Related Macular Degeneration heads toward clinical trials.”

Other jury members were: Christine Mummery, PhD, Chair of the Department of Anatomy and Embryology at Leiden University Medical Center in the Netherlands; Lorenz Studer, MD, Director of the Sloan-Kettering Center for Stem Cell Biology; and Irving Weissman, MD, Director of the Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine at the Stanford School of Medicine.

Professor Coffey’s research focuses on replacing retinal pigment epithelium (RPE), cells at the back of the eye thought to be damaged in AMD. His team was able to transform human embryonic stem cells into healthy, fully functioning RPE cells, which was not possible using adult stem cells. Professor Coffey and his team also successfully demonstrated that visual function could be restored in an animal model.

The NYSCF – Robertson Prize is awarded annually in recognition of innovative and groundbreaking achievement, or body of work, that has significantly advanced human stem cell research toward clinical applications. The terms of the prize require that the \$200,000 stipend be used to support further stem cell research.

The recipient will also receive an award sculpture designed by the architect Frank Gehry specifically for recipients of the NYSCF – Robertson Prize. In 2009 Gehry received NYSCF’s Humanitarian Award, given to non-scientists who are strong advocates for stem cell research.

About The New York Stem Cell Foundation:

Founded in 2005, NYSCF conducts cutting edge research at its own independent laboratory in New York City and provides grants to outstanding investigators at other research institutions. NYSCF also invests in the next generation of stem cell researchers through The NYSCF Fellowship Program, The NYSCF Investigator Program, and The NYSCF – Robertson Prize. More information is available at www.nyscf.org.