



NSW INVESTS IN AN 'AUSTRALIAN FIRST' FOR STEM CELL RESEARCH

Monday, 6 August 2007

The NSW Government will provide half a million dollars to create Australia's first stem cell lines derived from therapeutic cloning - a previously banned technique now allowed under legislation passed by the NSW Parliament just two months ago.

NSW Premier, Morris Iemma said the \$500,000 would come from the Government's **\$11.5 million Spinal Cord Injury and Related Neurological Conditions Fund**, established earlier this year.

"Put simply, this funding will enable NSW scientists to undertake work we hope will result in the creation of the country's first stem cell lines derived from somatic cell nuclear transfer embryos," Mr Iemma said.

"In fact, if successful it could well be a world first."

Presently, no human stem cell lines have been derived from therapeutic cloning within a rigorous, ethical framework. The world's existing stem cell lines have been created using mouse or excess IVF embryos, with the latter being the source of the ten or so lines created by Australian researchers since 2002.

NSW Minister for Science and Medical Research, Verity Firth formally announced the \$500,000 investment this morning while officially opening the inaugural annual *Stem Cells UNSW Symposium* at the Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick.

Ms Firth said that she was delighted to make the announcement before more than 100 leading scientists and researchers from the local stem cell community.

"This investment clearly demonstrates the Iemma Government's determination to keep NSW at the cutting edge of this relatively new field of scientific endeavour," said Ms Firth.

"The creation of new stem cell lines will help stimulate and accelerate research that has the very real potential to unlock the cures for many causes of human suffering, such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and type 1 diabetes.

"If this work is successful we will have the building blocks necessary to undertake disease specific studies and drug screening at volumes and intensities that cannot be done using human subjects.

"This essential scientific work will bring us closer to potential new discoveries that could transform lives."

An estimated 140,000 Australians have type 1 diabetes; 100,000 Australians are living with Parkinson's; and dementia impacts on the lives of nearly one million Australians with more than 1,000 new cases diagnosed each week.

Ms Firth said the funding will be awarded on merit through a competitive grants process and structured in a way that promotes collaborative and cross-disciplinary research efforts.

The final allocation of the funding will of course depend on a NSW research group receiving a licence from the Commonwealth Government's NHMRC Embryo Licensing Committee.

"The expertise gained through the development of stem cell lines using therapeutic cloning will become a resource for the entire scientific community," said Ms Firth.

"Over the longer term further public funds could be made available to secure and extend this early work."

"The lemma Government is making the investments necessary to ensure NSW remains a magnet for scientific endeavour and home to the world's leading researchers."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: *Stem Cells UNSW Symposium*

Today's Symposium was organised by the NSW Stem Cell Network – an organisation established in 2002 with a membership of more than 550 scientists and researchers.

The Network hosts an information sharing website and conducts regular workshops, seminars, conferences and courses to share knowledge and professional skills and to foster collaborative research and commercial initiatives.

The workshops and courses encompass both adult and embryonic stem cell research and address the science, medicine, ethics, law, business and public awareness of stem cell research and its applications.

The Network receives funding support from NSW Government.