Kim Irwin (kirwin@mednet.ucla.edu)
(310) 206-2805
Enrique Rivero (erivero@mednet.ucla.edu)
(310) 794-2273

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UCLA STEM CELL RESEARCHERS AWARDED $2.56 MILLION IN GRANTS FROM THE STATE TO CREATE NEW HUMAN STEM CELL LINES

Two Other UCLA Scientists Receive Disease Team Planning Awards

Two UCLA stem cell researchers today received grants from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) to create new pluripotent human stem cell lines that may one day help scientists better understand, diagnose and treat serious injury and disease.

Amander Clark, an assistant professor of molecular, cell and developmental biology, received $1,177,648 million to fund work to generate new human embryonic stem cell lines from both normal and genetically abnormal early embryos. Jerome Zack, a professor of medicine and microbiology, immunology, and molecular genetics, received $1,382,400 million to fund his work to develop and bank safe and well-characterized patient-specific induced pluripotent stem cell lines that can be used to study and potentially eliminate human diseases. Clark and Zack are researchers in the Eli and Edythe Broad Center of Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research.

CIRM, the state agency that administers Proposition 71 funding for stem cell research, received 50 grant applications from researchers across the state who wanted to develop new stem cell lines. In all, 16 grants were funded.

“Pluripotent stem cells have the potential to play a key role in developing effective stem-cell based therapies because of their unique ability to self-renew and differentiate into all the cells found in the body,” said Dr. Owen Witte, director of the Broad stem cell research center. “Developing new pluripotent stem cell lines is a crucial field of research, and we’re gratified that two of our top scientists were awarded grants to fund their promising projects.”

In all, CIRM awarded $23 million in grants to scientists from nine institutions for the creation of new human stem cell lines. The grants support two categories of research that are not currently federally funded, the creation of new stem cell lines using residual embryos generated by in vitro fertilization that are either no longer needed for reproductive purposes or are clinically inappropriate for implantation and would otherwise be destroyed; and projects with high potential but that may carry a significant risk of failure, such as the creation of safe cell lines from other sources using alternative methods such as reprogramming of adult cells.

Clark is collaborating with Nissim Benvenisty, co-director of the International Stem Cell Research Institute at Cedars Sinai Medical Center. Zack is collaborating with Kathrin

Plath, an assistant professor of biological chemistry at UCLA and a Broad stem cell center scientist.

CIRM also gave out 22 Disease Team Planning Awards today, totaling $1.1 million. The awards will enable a principal investigator to recruit a multi-disciplinary team to pursue therapies for specific diseases.

Broad stem cell research center scientist Irvin Chen, a professor of microbiology, immunology, and molecular genetics and director of the UCLA AIDS Institute, received a $52,500 grant. Dr. S. Thomas Carmichael, an associate professor of neurology, received a $44,792 grant. Chen will focus on stem cell-based therapies for AIDS, while Carmichael will work to develop a stem cell therapy to promote functional recovery in stroke.

The stem cell center was launched in 2005 with a UCLA commitment of $20 million over five years. A $20 million gift from the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation in 2007 resulted in the renaming of the center. With more than 150 members, the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research is committed to a multi-disciplinary, integrated collaboration of scientific, academic and medical disciplines for the purpose of understanding adult and human embryonic stem cells. The institute supports innovation, excellence and the highest ethical standards focused on stem cell research with the intent of facilitating basic scientific inquiry directed towards future clinical applications to treat disease. The center is a collaboration of the David Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA's Jonsson Cancer Center, the Henry Samueli School of Engineering and Applied Science and the UCLA College of Letters and Science. To learn more about the center, visit our web site at http://www.stemcell.ucla.edu/.

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