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Meet the Stem Cell Review Committee

The recently appointed stem cell review committee met for the first time last week to begin the in depth review on the current arrangements for using stem cells in Australia.

The Federal government appointed a panel of doctors, ethicists and scientists and has given them six months to complete the review. Included in this review will be whether to recommend allowing somatic cell nuclear transfer, also known as therapeutic cloning, or patient specific stem cell therapy, to occur. In that

time, the committee will have to consult state and territory governments and the public and publish its conclusions.

The chairman of the panel is a judge, John Lockhart. The members are Associate Professor Ian Kerridge, a clinical ethicist at the University of Sydney; Professor Barry Marshall, a gastroenterologist at the University of Western Australia; Professor Loane Skene, an expert in health law at the University of Melbourne; Professor Peter Schofield, Director of the Prince of Wales Medical Research

Institute in Sydney; and Professor Pamela McCombe, of the University of Queensland. Justice Lockhart said the Legislative Review Committee was aware that many people held diverse and passionate views about the current legislation, especially about research involving human embryos.

"I look forward to receiving submissions" he said. Those interested in providing submissions to the Lockhart Review, can read the terms of review and submit on-line at: <http://www.lockhartreview.com.au>

The Great Stem Cell Debate

Featuring in National Science Week 2005, ABC radio personality, Dr Norman Swan, will be hosting a series of Hypothetical Debates exploring the potential of therapeutic cloning in the not too distant future.

"This is a timely and significant debate," says Colin Honey, Chair of Stem Cell Ethics Australia, which is co-presenting this event together with the NSW Stem Cell Network. "It is necessary to make the public aware of these issues and to promote

discussion in order for stem cell technology to move forward in a positive way" he said.

This entertaining public event will provoke a panel of politicians, patients, GP's, scientists, bioethicists, health insurance lawyers and IVF companies to think deeply about stem cell technology and where it is going. Expert panelists include: Prof Rob Jansen IVF specialist, Dr Sue Page, GP and Prof Bernie Tuch, stem cell scientist.

The debate will be held in Sydney 6.30 – 8.30 pm

Wed 17 August, Garvan Institute of Medical Research, and again in Melbourne on Thurs 18 August. Register at: <http://www.diabetes.unsw.edu.au/stem>



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The stem cell debate is proudly sponsored by Victorian Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development,

Biotechnology Australia and Sydney IVF. It is kindly supported by the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute, the

Garvan Institute of Medical Research, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

Cairns warms up for 2007 Stem Cell Meeting

Australian delegates were in full force at the International Society of Stem Cell Researchers (ISSCR) meeting last month in San Francisco, with the Australian Stem Cell Centre prominent. "With over 900 presentations, the focus of the meeting was on the basic science rather than therapeutic applications," said Prof Bernie Tuch, one of the Australian delegates.

The Korean scientist, Prof Whang attracted a lot of interest as the world's first to publish data proving nuclear transfer can be used to create identical human embryos. It was of particular interest to many scientists from countries where this technology is still banned. What was most exciting for the Australian delegates was the announcement that the 2007

ISSCR meeting will be held in Cairns after the 2006 ISSCR meeting in Toronto. This is a rapidly growing conference and the 2007 meeting in Cairns could attract over 3,000 delegates based on past performance; in 2003 the ISSCR meeting attracted 700 delegates; in 2004 there were 1,400 delegates and this year, 2,100 delegates. Further info at; <http://www.isscr.org>

Stem Cells for General Practitioners

With all the stem cell hype in the media, many patients living with disease are under the impression that stem cells will provide the cure in the not to distant future. Indeed this could be true one day, but for now, the therapeutic application of stem cells is limited. "GPs are starting to see rising interest from their patients about potential stem cell therapies, and they need to be more aware of these to meet their patients' needs for information" said Mr Craig Cormick from Biotechnology Australia, who presented to an audience of General Practitioners (GPs) at the second in a series of Stem Cell Workshops

for GP's.



Craig Cormick,
Biotechnology Australia

"GPs tend to have an awareness of stem cells, but their knowledge is not deep - which is understandable, as this is a rapidly changing technology". He adds "GPs are going to find that patients increasingly want to know about stem cell treatments". Surveys completed by

the GPs after the Workshop showed that GPs, are aware that this is a very important area of medical research that may have an impact on many different health treatments explained Cormick.

With support again from the Australian Stem Cell Centre Education Committee and Biotechnology Australia, the next Stem Cell Workshop for GP's will be held in Adelaide during August. The NSW Stem Cell Network is co-ordinating this event as it has the previous two, which were held in Sydney. Further info: <http://www.biotechnology.gov.au>

Events for the Diary:

Event Date: 17 Aug 2005
The Great Stem Cell Debate in Sydney and Melbourne
<http://www.diabetes.unsw.edu.au/stem>

Event Date: 2 Sept 2005.
The Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute's 7th International Symposium 2005. Sydney Australia
http://www.victorchang.com.au/research/research_princesslecture.cfm

Event Date: 3-7 Sept 2005
15th International Society of Developmental Biologists Congress, Sydney, Australia
<http://www.isdb2005.com/>

Event Date: 4-7 Sept 2005
The Fertility Society of Australia Annual Scientific meeting, Christchurch, NZ
<http://www.waldronsmith.com.au/fsa2005>

Event Date: 4-7 Sept 2005
Society for Reproductive Biology Annual Scientific meeting, Perth, Australia
<http://www.esa-srb.org.au>

Event Date: 6-9 Nov 2005
Australian Stem Cell Centre 3rd Annual Scientific Conference, Gold Coast, Australia
<http://www.stemcells2005.org>

Event Date: June 2007
International Society for Stem Cell Research Meeting Cairns, Australia
<http://www.isscr.org/public/index.htm>

NSWSCN website launched

The NSW Stem Cell Network website has undergone a face-lift. The new web design allows for smoother navigation and provides links to relevant stem cell sites, as well as links to upcoming Network events and archives to past events. Please do take a minute to browse through the

website and provide any feedback.

As you browse, you may notice that the structure of the Network has also changed and become more formalized with an established executive committee and an advisory board (yet to be announced). The executive committee includes Dr Daniella Goldberg, Prof

Bernie Tuch, Professor Richard Harvey, stem cell scientist and Ms Heather Schoenheimer, business consultant.

Welcome aboard to Ms Sophie Diller who has recently been appointed the new Secretariat of the NSW Stem Cell Network. The web address is: <http://www.diabetes.unsw.edu.au/stem>

Book Review: Stem Cells at the Frontiers of Science

For the public and professionals who want to know more about the frontiers of stem cell science and the controversial stem cell debate in Australia, this book has it all.

"I wrote the book because science itself was the first casualty of the stem cells debates. It was weirdly distorted though being dragged across the political - ideological arena and I felt compelled to straighten things out, to translate stem cell science accurately so the layperson could engage rationally in the debate." said, the author, Dr Elizabeth Finkel.

Through an entertaining and personal narrative, reveals the story behind each of the stem cell scientist and their discovery. Rather than delivering the published paper, as scientists do at conferences, this book goes a step further to capture the science as well as the scientist's unique personal story and anecdotes.

Names such as Alan Trounson, Stephen Livesey, Silviu Itescu and Bernie Tuch are explored in depth in this book. Many of these will be familiar to the NSW Stem Cell Network members through past Workshops.

ABC book published this very pertinent and readable book in April 2005 and it is sure to be one of the more popular stem cell science books this year.



Dr Elizabeth Finkel, science writer.

Further information about the book at: <http://shop.abc.net.au>