

PRESS RELEASE: Monday 7th March. Embargoed until 2pm Tuesday 8th March

Stem cell network launched as Government boosts science spending

The East of England Stem Cell Network, launched tomorrow, is committed to supporting the development of stem cell research and its applications, for the benefit both of patients and the UK's commercial biomedical sector.

The EESCN launch is particularly timely: the government announced £1 billion increase in science spending yesterday, mentioning stem cell research as a priority area for funding, and pledging to make Britain the best place in the world for science.

Over 200 scientists, doctors, biotech executives, government regulators, ethics experts, disease charity representatives and others with interests in stem cell science will attend the launch, to hear Dr Mary Archer, Chair of EESCN, Professor Roger Pedersen and others speak.

The Network will be the first of its kind in England and will establish the East of England as a global leader in this field.

In the future, EESCN will be an invaluable resource to stem cell science:

- Helping the research community to keep abreast of important regulatory developments.
- Encouraging inward investment and business development.
- Engaging the public with educational events.
- Promoting the East of England and the UK as a centre of excellence in stem cell research.

Our new website www.eescn.org.uk will provide comprehensive and up to date news and information on stem cell science, regulation and policy in the UK and internationally.

Professor Roger Pedersen said: "Cambridge and the East of England represent the largest biotech cluster in the whole of Europe. As such, our area has the greatest concentration of intellectual capital in the areas of genomics, proteomics and cell developmental biology. These are the platform disciplines for the UK stem cell enterprise. Therefore we look forward to tremendous contributions from Cambridge and the East of England as stem cell research moves forward to the clinic and delivers the therapeutic benefits of regenerative medicine."

Lord Naren Patel, Chair of the UK Stem Cell Bank Steering Committee, will speak at the launch. He said "We are fortunate in the UK to have a regulatory framework that has put in place careful checks and balances without placing inhibiting constraints on researchers - the ideal situation for the development of stem cell science as shown by the establishment of the UK Stem Cell Bank."

Dr Ron Zimmern, Director of Cambridge Genetics Knowledge Park, coordinators of EESCN said: "The existence of a network that is able to bring together scientists, clinicians, the commercial sector and academics who understand the ethical legal and social implications of this technology will bring significant benefit to stem cell science in the UK."

Dr Cathy Prescott, Science Director of venture capital firm Avlar Bioventures will also speak at the launch. She said "The success of stem cell 'therapeutics' (cell and drug) is dependent on a coordinated approach actively engaging all relevant sectors including research, regulatory, clinical,

community, ethics, industry and financial. EESCN will be a forum to collate information, educate, disseminate and advise on stem cell science.”

Kate Phillips, from East of England Development Agency (EEDA) the funders of EESCN, will deliver the launch’s closing address. She said “We are fortunate that the East of England is already recognised for its exceptional resources in stem cell science, and its significant role in maintaining the UK’s competitive edge. EESCN has an essential role to play in achieving effective translation of research into commercial reality, and if nurtured properly, has the potential to position Cambridge as the key international centre in the exploitation of stems cells.”

Notes

1. For more information, to arrange an interview or if you would like to attend the East of England Stem Cell Launch (Tuesday 8th March, 12.30 – 3.30 pm, Wellcome Trust Conference Centre, Cambridge) **please call Anna Leach 01223 741510.**
2. Expertise in the East of England:
 - Europe’s most successful biotech cluster around Cambridge
 - Many research groups with interests in this field at the University of Cambridge and the University of East Anglia.
 - Internationally renowned hospitals Papworth and Addenbrooke’s
 - The UK Stem Cell Bank (located at the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control in Potters Bar, Hertfordshire)
 - The recently established Cambridge Stem Cell Institute at the University of Cambridge.
 - The Babraham Institute and the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute.