

Stem Cell Initiatives Proliferate

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With collaborations being the mantra for success, a joint UK-India workshop was held in April to foster stem cell research.

The UK has a pragmatic, but not permissive, policy on embryonic stem cell research. India too has a similar approach on stem cell work and a lot of advanced research is happening in this sphere. India and the UK are keen on leveraging their respective strengths and explore collaborative therapeutic work in the field. As a major step in this direction, a week long "Indo-UK stem cell workshop" was organized in April in Bangalore.

British high commissioner to India, Sir Michael Arthur noted, "We recognize India's growing strengths in this field of research. We hope that the stem cell workshop will be a catalyst for a number of Indo-UK collaborations in this area of research that holds much promise for benefiting human health."

Sir Arthur pointed out that the global revenues in the stem cell and tissue engineering market are estimated to touch \$10 billion by 2013 and that the UK plans to achieve sizeable share through collaborations and joint ventures. "Stem cell research in the UK is funded primarily by the medical research council and its strength lies in therapeutic cloning, diabetes and neuron diseases and it is here that the UK is looking at taking up collaborative research to carry forward its application," added Sir Arthur. The UK in its 2005 budget has announced £2.5 billion allocation for biotech. "A certain amount of this is kept aside for stem cell research. Our Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council has invested about £17 million in stem cell research over the last 10 years and our Medical Research Council spends about £4.5 million annually. Since 1995, the Wellcome Trust has awarded 15 project and program grants specifically for stem cell research, totaling about £4.5 million."

Prof Azim Surani of University of Cambridge, lead the UK delegation, which was represented at the workshop by National Stem Cell Bank, the UK Stem Cell Initiative, the UK Stem Cell Foundation (led by private sector), the Human Embryology and Fertilization Authority and a number of other stem cell centers.

In another development, Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, the union minister for health and family welfare, said, "The government would also boost stem cell research in India and informed that the country would host an international conference on stem cell research in September 2005 in Mumbai."