

Brazil Earmarks US\$ 4.7 Million for 41 Stem Cell Research Project

Contributed by Bianca Paiva
Monday, 05 September 2005

During the next two years, 41 research projects involving embryonic and adult stem cells, mostly removed from bone marrow and umbilical cords, among other tissues, should be developed in ten Brazilian states.

By the end of this year, the Ministries of Health and of Science and Technology intend to spend US\$ 3.433 million (8 million reais) on these projects, and another US\$ 1.287 million (3 million reais) will be disbursed in 2006.

Last Tuesday, August 30, the National Scientific and Technological Development Council (CNPq) announced the complete list of approved projects. The list is available at the site www.cnpq.br.

"This is an extremely new area of global research, and it is a very promising area. The results that have been obtained all over the world are very significant for various fields of health, and Brazil has played an important role in this," affirms Manoel Barral, director of Thematic and Sectorial Themes in the CNPq.

Among the proposals that were selected, three are studies dealing exclusively with embryonic stem cells, those that possess that capacity to transform themselves into any kind of human body cell.

Another four studies are related to both adult and embryonic human cells, and the other 34 are based solely on adult stem cells.

The projects were chosen through an open competition, for which proposals were solicited in April. Altogether, 106 proposals were presented.

The state of Rio de Janeiro, where 14 studies will be carried out, was the state with the largest number of winning proposals, followed by São Paulo (12) and Rio Grande do Sul (6).

The states of Pernambuco and Paraná will each be the site of two research projects, while the states of Minas Gerais, Bahia, Goiás, Rio Grande do Norte, and Santa Catarina were favored with one project apiece. Contracting for the projects was slated to begin Monday, September 5.

The use of embryonic stem cells for research in Brazil was permitted by the approval of the Biosecurity Law in March. But the law establishes certain restrictions, such as the use of donated embryos only, with the parents' consent.

Another requirement is that the embryos must be unviable or have to have been frozen for at least three years from the date of the law's publication. Moreover, the law prohibits the sale of these embryos, genetic manipulation, and human and therapeutic cloning.

The studies are supposed to be conducted over a period of up to two years. The funds will be used to pay for the so-called basic research (in vitro experiments), the pre-clinical phase (animal experimentation), and the clinical phase (experiments with human beings).

According to the director of the CNPq, it is hard to say when the technologies developed by the studies will be available to the population.

Barral imagines that, if the research projects proceed rapidly, palpable results will be feasible within three years, but the time period may be longer.

"If there is no problem with the technology, if it and what it promises to do are accomplished without problems, the result will be reasonably rapid, a matter of two or three years.

"But this can't be guaranteed at this stage, because it is a very new field all over the world, and there is no past history ensuring the possibility of very rapid progress."

Agência Brasil