

2010 Annual Report: Outreach

News at CIRM

Outreach

Inside California and abroad, CIRM has worked to broaden understanding of stem cell research—the science and the hope—and to strengthen communities of researchers themselves.

California and Beyond

Within California, people had three opportunities this year to learn more about work funded by CIRM in their neighborhood. Town Hall Forums in San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco brought CIRM scientists together with community members to discuss ongoing science and the progress toward cures

The San Francisco Town Hall Forum, co-sponsored by the International Society for Stem Cell Research, which was holding its annual meeting in the city, focused on the growing trend of stem cell tourism.

Unregulated clinics throughout the world have been offering unproven therapies at great cost to desperate patients. Not only might those treatments not help, Jeanne Loring, PhD, a CIRM grantee at Scripps Research Institute who spoke at the forum, warned that they could be dangerous.

"Stem cell tourism is an exploitation of the promise of stem cells," she said. The forum was recorded and is available on the CIRM web page.

The ISSCR has offered to investigate clinics at no cost through their new web page: A Closer Look at Stem Cell Treatments www.closerlookatstemcells.org.

CIRM's educational mission expands beyond once-per-year forums. A new education portal on the web site now provides a series of five modular curricula available to high school teachers. Each can fit within existing California teaching requirements, and provides lesson plans and hands-on activities.

The extensive set of course materials and activity resources will help high school and other educators prepare the youth of California to join the fast-growing biotech economy and help that sector find the workers its leaders say are already in short supply.

A Day to Remember

The third annual Stem Cell Awareness Day expanded CIRM's stem cell outreach to 20 schools within California, eight educational events in the state, six events in other U.S. States, and activities in four countries.

The day, held October 6, was proclaimed state-wide by the governor of California. Scientists within California visited 20 schools with lectures and school-wide assemblies about stem cell science. In addition, 20 events world wide included tours or public lectures to educate their local community about this important field of research and the work that's going on at institutions near them.

Internationally, Monash University in Victoria, Australia held a day-long event with talks and activities and events in Ireland, England, Australia and Canada educated people about stem cell science in those countries.

Bridging the Divide

Outreach within the stem cell community keeps those scientists connected and the research pushing forward.

Our CIRM Bridges trainees, who are undergraduate and masters students doing work in California stem cell labs, rubbed elbows at a meeting in the summer. Students from around the state presented their internship projects and discussed their plans for the future.

The students, many of whom are from lower economic level homes, have plans for graduate school, medical school, or careers in

California's flourishing stem cell industry.

"I love it and I think that I'll never turn my back on biology now," said Nicole Haste, a Bridges student at San Francisco State University.

Even established stem cell scientists benefit from a bit of face time. The CIRM grantee meeting in the spring brought together grantees and their lab members to present results, talk about obstacles and form collaborations.

In June, many of these same scientists met some 4,000 of their international colleagues at the yearly meeting of the International Society for Stem Cell Research, co-sponsored by CIRM and held in San Francisco.

Events like these bring scientists together to overcome barriers in translating stem cell science into cures.

Reaching Across State Lines

CIRM only funds research carried out in California. However, excellent stem cell science is taking place worldwide. In order to connect the leading minds in stem cell science, CIRM has formed partnerships with eight international funding agencies and three U.S. states, with the regional government of Andalusia, the state of New York and the state of Wisconsin joining the fold in the past year.

These partnerships connect outstanding scientists without regard to geographic location. When an award that includes an international collaborator is approved for funding, CIRM funds the scientists in California and the funding partner is responsible for the international portion of the research.

This past year the CIRM governing board approved four Early Translational Awards that include German collaborators, one Basic Biology II award that includes a Japanese collaborator, and two Stem Cell Transplantation Awards with Australian collaborators, bringing the total to 15 international teams.

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