
Stem Cell Agency's Board Approves \$70 Million Plan to Develop Innovative Alpha Clinics

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San Francisco, CA – A \$70 million plan to create a new statewide network of sites that will act as a hub for stem cell clinical trials was approved by the governing Board of California's stem cell agency, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM).

The goal of the Alpha Stem Cell Clinics Network is to support and accelerate clinical trials for programs funded by the agency, as well as those developed elsewhere by academic researchers, clinicians and pharmaceutical companies. As the field evolves, the delivery of approved new stem cell therapies will become another focus.

"These clinics have the potential to revolutionize how we deliver stem cell therapies to patients," says Alan Trounson, PhD, President of CIRM. "Stem cell therapies are a completely new way of treating diseases and disorders so we need a completely new way of delivering those in a safe and effective manner. These clinics will help us do just that and the clinical trials carried out in this network will fulfill the agency's promise of bringing new therapies to patients who need them."

The network will consist of up to five clinic sites at established academic institutions and a coordinating center that will help the clinics streamline challenging processes such as enrolling patients, managing regulatory procedures and sharing data.

The Alpha Clinics will speed testing and distribution of experimental stem cell therapies and will focus on therapies that involve transplanting or infusing stem cells. The proposed clinical network would be one of the first to focus solely on stem cell therapies.

An additional goal of the network will be educating people seeking such therapies, or interested in enrolling in clinical trials for testing them. Currently, these people must navigate a thicket of confusing information. Searching online, they may not be able to find reputable clinics offering proven therapies, and may instead come across websites featuring procedures that are offered as "therapies" but have no hard data behind them, and can be ineffective and unsafe. The Alpha Clinics network will provide packages of reliable information as well as patient counselors who can explain the reliable information and data that this initiative will create. More details about the concept are available on the CIRM website.

"Our goal is to create a resource that will do more than just offer clinical trials and proven therapies, it will also offer guidance," says Natalie DeWitt, PhD, Special Projects officer at the stem cell agency. "One important role of the Alpha Clinics will be to tell people what is proven and what should be avoided,"

The meeting also saw the swearing-in of three new Board members, and the departure of one of the original members of the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC) the agency's governing Board.

The new members are Dr. Lloyd Minor from Stanford; Al Rowlett, the new Patient Advocate for Mental Health; and Dr. Lars Berglund from UC Davis, who is the alternate for Ken Burtis.

The Board also honored Philip Pizzo, MD for his long service to the stem cell agency. Dr. Pizzo was Dean of the Stanford School of Medicine from 2001 to 2012 and previously was Chief of the National Cancer Institute's pediatric department. His clinical research focused on pediatric cancer and pediatric HIV infections, including some of the earliest work on antiviral treatments for HIV-positive children. He left the Board when he retired from Stanford.

Jonathan Thomas, PhD, JD, Chairman of the ICOC, praised Dr. Pizzo, saying: "Phil has left an indelible mark on CIRM and has been an invaluable force for advancing stem cell science in California. We shall miss him but wish him well in his future endeavors."

After listening to several Board members praise his wisdom, intellect and leadership, Dr. Pizzo responded with characteristic humility and humor saying: "I am deeply humbled to be here and feel I'm almost at the point of listening to an obituary. But this has been very meaningful and the honor has been mine to serve with you. I thank you for everything and know that this will continue to bring to the citizens of California the true benefits of the research and the science we have funded."

About CIRM: CIRM was established in November 2004 with the passage of Proposition 71, the California Stem Cell Research and Cures

Act. The statewide ballot measure, which provided \$3 billion in funding for stem cell research at California universities and research institutions, was overwhelmingly approved by voters, and called for the establishment of an entity to make grants and provide loans for stem cell research, research facilities, and other vital research.

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