

May 22, 2018

Ms. Maria Bonneville
Vice President of Administration
Executive Director of the ICOC
California Institute for Regenerative Medicine
mbonneville@cirm.ca.gov

RE: TRAN1-10995: Morphological and functional integration of stem cell derived retina organoid sheets into degenerating retina models

Dear Ms. Bonneville,

I am delighted to offer this letter of support on behalf of the Macular Degeneration Partnership for the above named CIRM-Translational grant proposal submitted by Magdalene Seiler, PhD.

Macular Degeneration Partnership (MDP) is a patient advocacy group, founded 30 years ago in Los Angeles with a mission to provide information to individuals suffering from age-related macular degeneration (AMD). We estimate there could be up to 1 million individuals in California affected by AMD and that number will grow as the population ages.

In 2016, MDP moved to the campus of University of California – Irvine School of Medicine where it became a program of the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute. While based in Southern California, our reach is national. MDP advocates for families affected by AMD, and publishes e-newsletters on subjects of interest to more than 12,000 subscribers. We also maintain a website, (www.amd.org), social media channels, facilitate support groups, and staff a ‘warm-line’ where we are contacted by patients or family members seeking information.

One of our chief roles is promoting the promise of research and advances in the treatment of degenerative retinal diseases. This news is highly anticipated by our friends and gives hope to individuals concerned about their own situation. You are, no doubt, aware of the tragic events in 2015 in Florida, when three AMD patients, anxious to save their failing eyesight underwent ‘stem cell therapy’ and permanently lost their vision. In our newsletters, we have stressed the distinction between these unregulated, unsupervised clinics and the methodical, focused stem cell research like that supported by the CIRM.

The project that Dr. Seiler proposes uses retinitis pigmentosa (RP) as its target, and this is entirely appropriate as we understand the genetic basis for this rare ocular disease, there are available animal models, and the degeneration of retinal cells – and accompanying loss of vision - presents early in life.

MDP has previously highlighted research conducted in Dr. Seiler's lab in our newsletter as an example of rigorous research conducted on animal models of human disease. The eye – and especially the retina – is an appropriate setting for innovative stem cell research. Dr. Seiler is an acknowledged expert in this field; she has a highly developed team of collaborators, and a well-equipped lab. She is intensely focused on this problem and is in a position to make important contributions to our understanding of stem cell therapy for degenerative retinal disease.

Treatment to rescue lost vision resulting from RP will meet with enormous approval in the AMD community. Friends of the Macular Degeneration Partnership have been enthusiastic about advances in the treatment of retinal disease: the regeneration of photoreceptor cells for RP would offer hope for those affected by AMD. I am confident that Dr. Seiler will keep our network of interested families apprised of this project's progress. My hope is that we will someday be able to offer a stem cell therapy for retinal diseases like RP and AMD based on knowledge gained through this study.

The Macular Degeneration Partnership strongly supports this grant proposal and urges its funding by CIRM.

With best wishes,



Mary Prudden, JD
Program Director, Macular Degeneration Partnership