

MEDIA RELEASE

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Scientists call for action on European stem cell legislation

Leading stem cell scientists are today calling for action to remove political and legislative barriers that hinder collective research across Europe

Scientists from EuroStemCell and ESTOOLS – the two major European-funded stem cell research consortia - are working together to highlight the impact that differing legislative positions in European countries has on collaborative research, particularly in Germany and Italy.

In a joint statement sent to Members of the European Parliament, they are calling for harmonisation of current laws in the hope that their European counterparts are able to collaborate on international projects without fear of legal reprisal.

Currently, stem cell legislation differs across Europe. Projects that are perfectly legal in Sweden and the UK could result in a three-year prison sentence in Germany. Researchers from countries with very restrictive legislation might also become liable by taking on coordinating positions in other European institutions.

Professor Peter Andrews, from the University of Sheffield's Centre for Stem Cell Biology and coordinator of the ESTOOLS consortium, said: "Despite common funding through the 6th and 7th framework of the European Commission, current legislation means that scientists within Europe cannot freely exchange personnel and cell lines. This has huge consequences for stem cell research in Europe, limiting the ability of researchers with different expertise in different countries to work together for the common good."

Austin Smith, Director of the Wellcome Trust Centre for Stem Cell Research, added: "EuroStemCell scientists from across Europe are working together to compare embryonic and tissue stem cells and their potential for medical applications. However, the situations in Germany and Italy present constant difficulties because our colleagues in these countries may be punished for taking part in research activities of the project."

The announcement by the scientists follows the joint workshop on 'Ethical aspects of stem cell research in Europe' held in Berlin in April this year.

The EuroStemCell and ESTOOLS projects comprise of 29 research teams from academic institutions and biotechnology enterprises active in 12 states across the European Research Area. These projects therefore represent a significant force for integrating and advancing Europe's R&D effort in stem cell technology.

Notes for editors:

The 20 partners in **ESTOOLS** work across the borders of 10 countries. The project aims to advance understanding of human embryonic stem cells and the mechanisms and conditions that lead them to become specialised cells. Further information on EuroStemCell is available at www.estools.eu.

EuroStemCell aims to build the scientific foundations required to take stem cell technology to the clinic. The project combines the expertise of more than 100 researchers across 27 research groups in 16 partner institutions. Further information on EuroStemCell is available at www.eurostemcell.org.

Both projects are European Union 6th Framework Programme funded.

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