Birmingham stem cell science will be boosted by launch of new UK network

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The launch of the first national network to promote stem cell research across the UK, will boost the work of scientists working at the University of Birmingham according to one of the University's most senior stem cell biologists.

Jon Frampton, the University's Professor of Stem Cell Biology, will sit on the steering committee of the UK National Stem Cell Network (UKNSCN) alongside seven other UK scientists.

The network, which is launched today in London, has been set up to bring together scientists to provide greater coordination and coherence to national and regional stem cell research efforts.

By acting as a focus for UK stem cell research, the UKNSCN aims to help maintain the UK's role as the world leader in this area of science.

Professor Frampton comments: "The network will exist to represent stem cell research activity in the country as a whole. It will act as a valuable voice of reason that people can believe and offer sound judgment on stem cell issues and to help researchers share technology and expertise.

As Birmingham has a large number of researchers involved in stem cell work it is important that we contribute to the ongoing debates about how to develop this research in the future."

Stem cells are of particular interest to scientists and clinicians because of their potential to provide novel therapeutic approaches for diseases ranging from heart failure and degenerative diseases, such as Parkinson's, to cancer.

At Birmingham there are a number of research groups involved directly in stem cell science. A principal area of research involves studies on the earliest stem cells that underlie the immune system and how they are regulated throughout life and can be affected in age-related deficiencies or cancer.

A second major focus is to explore the potential of stem cells in novel therapies for tissue repair and regeneration, capitalising on local world-class expertise in immunology and transplantation to investigate how to maximise the chances of successful incorporation of replacement cells in a clinical context.

Professor Frampton continues: "At Birmingham we have particular strengths in two key areas of stem cell research. Firstly, in basic science, exploring how stem cells persist throughout life and retain the potential to differentiate. Secondly, we have a number of scientists exploring how stem cells operate to regenerate individual tissues, with the eventual aim of translating this knowledge into therapies. This is an incredibly fast moving area of science, which is why it needs a national voice."

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Notes to Editors

The UKNSCN is the research community's response to a Government review in 2005 which called for a new network to bring together the various sub-disciplines of UK stem cell science.

Following an online consultation and a town meeting in summer 2006 the community agreed the establishment of the UKNSCN for an initial period of two years and agreed its initial activities.

UKNSCN will be holding its first Annual Science Meeting in April 2008, where current status and methods to improve coordination of multidisciplinary research will be assessed.

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