

Media Release - Alberta Council of Technologies (19-JUN-09)

The Promise and Potential of Stem Cell Therapies in Alberta – A Public Forum

As anyone with aging loved-ones is aware, the burden of degenerative disease is tremendous both in human suffering and the economic impact associated with lost productivity and increased treatment expenditures. For patients and their caregivers, age-related diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's can be devastating. It is a matter of statistical fact that the impact of age-associated degeneration will increase as Alberta's population ages and its effects increasingly felt by all.

Ten years ago and certainly before, age-associated dysfunction was viewed as an inevitable part of the aging process. However, there is an emerging awareness that the power and potential of regenerative medicine in the form of stem cell therapies can offer Albertans some hope. Many of these therapies are already under development, and initial findings indicate that the promise of stem therapies is real. Much work remains before effective therapies become widely available and the opportunities and benefits are clear for those economies that invest in their development, both from a health care and economic perspective.

Alberta has an aging population and its associated health care consequences, tremendous resources, and a need for diversification of its economy. It seems that the investment in regenerative medicine technologies is a perfect fit for Alberta's high-tech economy but is Alberta ready to enter the world of regenerative medicine and stem cell therapies? Can we afford not to be?

The Alberta Council of Technologies (ABCtech.ca) is co-hosting back-to-back events in Edmonton and Calgary on June 22nd and 23rd to examine just these questions. In Edmonton, Dr. Martin Ferguson-Pell, Dean of the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine of the University of Alberta, while in Calgary, Dr. Sam Weiss, Director of the Hotchkiss Brain Institute at the University of Calgary, will demystify stem cell therapies and outline the vast opportunities they represent to groups of diverse audiences including policymakers, healthcare professionals, business entrepreneurs and the interested general public.

The keynote speakers are optimistic about the potential of stem cells. Weiss says "I think that the interesting thing about stem cells is that they have tremendous potential. Thanks to additional research across the globe, there are more avenues we haven't conceived yet." , while Ferguson-Pell states "The University of Alberta is developing significant capacity for research in regenerative medicine, this has exciting opportunities for health care in the development of new therapies and new ways of delivering treatments."

The president of ABCtech, Dr. Perry Kinkaide said "Imagine a future when cells taken from your own body will be used to mend a bone, restore hair and skin, or prevent, reverse or even cure a number of diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. This is the true scope of the possibility that I think is important to get across."

Kinkaide continues, "Across Alberta researchers are involved in many aspects of regenerative medicine which could be developed into products and applied to conditions such as strokes, heart attacks, diabetes and many others. It is my hope that this event will help focus attention and efforts to realize their potential as soon as possible."

Both events are being co-hosted by the Alberta Council of Technologies and the Alberta Health Industry Association and are being sponsored by Pfizer Inc. and the Edmonton and Calgary Associations for Advanced Technology.

To register please visit <http://www.abctech.ca>.

For further information:

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