

## **Stem Cell Therapies – Overhauling Healthcare in the 21st Century**

The forces and sources of change are transforming health care as we know it. Science and technology combined with the failing economics of the current health care system are converging. Perry Kinkaide, President of the Alberta Council of Technologies notes that “The implications may be profound and potentially disruptive.” He states, “ New technologies are appearing faster and faster, promising to fix what's broken in the body and to transform health care as we know it. Rarely have we been able to speak of solutions, that is, cures, for some of the most debilitating diseases of aging and trauma.” These “miraculous” treatment technologies are emerging at the very time when political pressure is mounting to fix costs, accessibility and delivery times and to anticipate an expected increase in demand associated with the degenerative diseases of an aging population. As pressures mount, many nations are being forced to rethink the design and financing of their overall healthcare systems. Enter "stem cell therapies."

Even today, the status of healthcare remain more important to the public, than even the status of the economy. In Alberta, rather than wait and stew, the Alberta Council of Technologies initiated a year-long campaign to first engage researchers and subsequently patients, caregivers and the public On-line and on-site in a dialogue to address a technology with the promise of over-hauling the healthcare system as we know it. “Stem cells” now found throughout the body, and throughout one's lifetime, hold the promise to draw on the healing powers of the body to address some of the mankind's most debilitating degenerative diseases, diseases that also diminish the productive capabilities of the patient and their caregivers.

Kevin Perrott, President of the Lifestar Institute and an advocate for addressing issues of aging, notes that “Stem cells are no longer the restrictive domain of the fetus. Since discovering that they appear throughout the body, throughout our lifetime, the feasibility of 'healing thyself' has emerged as a genuine possibility.” He notes that “Daily we learn of parts of the body – tissues and nerves, being regenerated and diseases of aging being treated.” Yet confusion reigns and myths prevail that may impede speeding the treatment “from the lab to the bedside.”

What are the prospects in our lifetime of seeing Alzheimers, Parkinsons, Huntington diseases; arthritis and blindness; burns and bone damage treated, even reversed? When, where, how, and at what cost? These and other audience generated questions make the unique, first time in North America, public forums promising to be exciting, informative and provocative! The public forums compliment a National campaign launched by the Canadian Stem Cell Foundations, also a sponsor of the Alberta initiative. The purpose of the Foundations's campaign says James Price, Executive Director, “Is to build a network to advocate for speeding up the delivery of stem cell therapies for Canadians.”

The forums in Alberta are hosted by the Alberta Council of Technologies – a non-profit, voluntary organization. The forums are supported by a diverse range of sponsors and are designed to engage specialized expertise, patient and caregiver advocates plus the public in a dialogue to investigate a wide-range of business and research, treatment and patient issues. The intent is to help demystify the science and advance the delivery of stem cell therapies from the laboratory to the bedside. The public forums in Calgary Nov 25th and in Edmonton Nov 26th and the On-line webcast [www.ABCtech.ca](http://www.ABCtech.ca) at 7PM MST November 26th will conclude the year-long research and patient dialogue, and establish the framework for a National Forum in 2010 for preparing a National Action Plan for advancing stem cell therapies.

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