



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Gov. Blagojevich, Comptroller Hynes announce \$10 million in state stem cell research grants**  
*Ten grants awarded to Illinois hospitals and universities to conduct critical stem cell research*

CHICAGO – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich and Comptroller Dan Hynes today announced ten grants worth a total of \$10 million for the life-saving work of stem cell research at several Illinois hospitals and research institutions. Last summer by Executive Order, Governor Blagojevich and Comptroller Hynes created the Illinois Regenerative Medicine Institute (IRMI), making Illinois the first state in the Midwest, and only the fourth state in the nation, to commit public funds to stem cell research. Researching and studying stem cells allows scientists and doctors to better understand what causes serious medical illnesses and conditions such as Alzheimer's, diabetes, spinal cord injury, stroke, and heart disease, in hopes of discovering new ways to treat or even cure them.

"This is the first time Illinois is awarding state funded grants for stem cell research and that makes today an important day for our state. The promise of stem cell research is unlimited. We need to do everything we can to help our scientists and researchers make the most of it," said Governor Blagojevich.

"In the world of medical research, the fight for cures is waged one grant at a time. Today, I am proud to say we've given our scientists ten million more weapons to win that fight. In so doing, we are also giving hope to the millions of Americans who suffer from debilitating diseases that stem cell research has the potential to defeat," said Comptroller Hynes.

"Today's investments in stem cell research are vital to finding cures for life threatening diseases that afflict thousands of Illinois citizens," said Lt. Governor Pat Quinn, who's also been a steadfast supporter of stem cell research in the state.

"Today marks an important step not only for the medical research community in Illinois, but also for the many people who hope to one day benefit from the cures and treatments their research will help develop," said Representative Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago). "I am pleased to stand with Governor Blagojevich and Comptroller Hynes in affirming the state's commitment to this potentially life-saving research."

Gov. Blagojevich's Executive Order last July directed the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to create a program to award \$10 million in grants for stem cell research. IDPH developed the Illinois Regenerative Medicine Institute (IRMI) after looking at what stem cell research efforts were already underway in Illinois, and determined the best method of awarding the grant money to yield the greatest benefits. IDPH created a panel consisting of two bio-ethicists and six medical professionals with expertise in stem cells from Ireland and all over the

United States, with the exception of Illinois, to review grant applications.

“We received 24 applications for stem cell research grants, all of which were innovative and had great potential,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Eric E. Whitaker. “With the grants awarded today, we are looking forward to the groundbreaking medical advancements for many debilitating diseases that stem cell research will yield.”

Grants were awarded to the following institutions:

- \$870,000 - Guillermo A. Ameer, Northwestern University for stem cell-based vascular tissue engineering to enable the development of replacement blood vessels and therefore eliminating the need to harvest existing blood vessels from the patient.
- \$800,000 - George H. DeVries, University of Illinois at Chicago for stem cell therapy for recovery from ischemic stroke.
- \$1,999,944 - Mary J. Hendrix, Children’s Memorial Hospital for reversal of disease progression by stem cells.
- \$1,990,309 - Ronald Hoffman, University of Illinois at Chicago for the Center for the Development of Stem Cell Therapies for Human Diseases to focus on the use of human embryonic stem cells and adult tissue-specific stem cells for the treatment of blood disorders, lung diseases and heart repair.
- \$800,000 - Gwendolyn L. Kartje, Hines VA Hospital for human adult bone marrow-derived stem cell therapy for recovery from Ischemic stroke.
- \$250,000 - Stephen J. Kaufman, University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign for therapeutic implementation of mesoangioblast stem cells in muscular dystrophy to advance stem cell therapy for muscle and neurodegenerative disease and injury and provide a mechanism for repairing a variety of diseased tissues.
- \$473,212 - Dorothy A. Sipkins, University of Chicago for mechanisms of hematopoietic stem cell homing in normal and disease states with the goal of understanding the molecular signals that blood-producing cells use to travel to specific areas where these cells can survive and regenerate.
- \$1,400,000 - Patrick J. Stiff, Loyola University for unlocking the clinical potential of umbilical cord blood derived stem cells to use as both blood cells as well as other tissues, including the heart muscle and nerves.
- \$564,512 - Xiaozhong A. Wang, Northwestern University for genetic control of pluripotency and differentiation in embryonic stem cells to control the self-renewal and multipotency of stem cells.
- \$591,322 - Matthew B. Wheeler, University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign for mesenchymal stem cells using high-speed robot to culture, screen and differentiate stem cells as well as assess the suitability as an alternative to bone marrow as a source of adult stem cells in tissue engineered devices for the clinical reconstruction of bone and soft tissue defects using human-patient derived fat.

Stem cells are cells that have the potential to develop into many different types of healthy new cells in the body. As described by the National Institutes of Health, they act like an internal repair system for the body. Stem cells can divide to replenish other cells for as long as the body is alive. When a stem cell divides, each new cell has the potential to either remain a stem cell or become another type of cell like a muscle cell, a red blood cell, or a brain cell.

Studying stem cells allows doctors to analyze how cells transform into other cells. Many of the most serious illnesses or birth defects are caused by problems during the transformation process. Understanding the process better may help doctors discover how to prevent, treat or cure illnesses and conditions.

A potential way to use stem cells is to make new cells or tissues for medical therapies. Currently, donated organs and tissues are used to replace those that are diseased or destroyed. But there are far more people who need organ transplants than there are organs available. Some stem cells offer the possibility of making replacement cells and tissues to treat various diseases and conditions in organs including Alzheimer's, spinal cord injury, stroke, burns, heart disease, diabetes, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, before organs need replacement.

The grantees are required to provide IDPH with semi-annual and annual reports of progress on their research. Additionally, they will report to their institutional review board and receive annual approval for continuance from them.

The IRMI program is designed to issue grants for stem cell research to study therapies, protocols, medical procedures, possible cures for, and potential mitigations of major diseases, injuries, and orphan diseases; to support all stages of the process of developing cures from laboratory research through successful clinical trials; and to establish the appropriate regulatory standards for research and facilities development.