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Global Stem Cell Research Network Approach Key to Therapeutics Success

BOSTON--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Oct 2, 2007 - Invest Australia, the Australian Government's inward investment agency said at the Stem Cell Summit today that the Australian model of a unified and nationally backed stem cell research approach supported rapid commercialization and potential therapeutics for patients in the areas of haematology and cardiac and respiratory diseases.

However, according to Professor Stephen Livesey, the CEO of the Australian Stem Cell Centre (ASCC), a unified global approach made up of stem cell networks like the Australian model is the key to real sustained international success for the sector.

"The ASCC is a unique, well-funded and highly regarded stem cell initiative, which attracts outstanding researchers from within Australia and abroad, to collaborate on all areas of stem cell research," said Professor Livesey.

Livesey, also co-chair of the International Consortium of Stem Cell Networks (ICSCN), said that the ICSCN was established in 2004 and received funding from the Victorian State Government to bring together major stem cell initiatives around the world to exchange knowledge, to create harmony and to accelerate stem cell outcomes.

It aims to unify international efforts to accelerate opportunities to make stem cell therapy a reality for a broad range of debilitating diseases by:

- providing a forum for scientific and other discussion;
- providing a forum for exchange of best practice and development of international equivalents of national initiatives;
- organizing and promoting international workshops and symposia;
- encouraging and facilitating the exchange of researchers between network members; and
- facilitating communications to help in the coordination of research and translation between different countries.

The ICSCN currently has sixteen members from around the world including the Stem Cell Network, Canada, the UK National Stem Cell Network and the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine.

"Stem cell science is an exemplary case study in the globalization of scientific research," said Livesey.

"Following in the footsteps of the human genome project, stem cell scientists across the world are overcoming boundaries imposed by distance and disparity of interests, funding and legislation, to work in a more coordinated way, while maintaining the healthy competition necessary for acceleration of research towards a real clinical result."

Livesey said Australia had a long history of success and leadership in both IVF and stem cell research and had considered and faced the legal, translational and regulatory challenges, together with the value and potential they offered.

"The ASCC, is the flagship of Australia's stem cell research efforts, and is an excellent example of what can be achieved through a focused, long-term funding strategy and provides the basis for Australian stem cell scientists to take a prominent position on the world stage," said Livesey.

With secure long-term funding, a multi-disciplinary approach and collaborative environment, the creation and application of technology and therapeutic products surrounding stem cells is both fostered and accelerated at ASCC.

The Centre has partnered with ten leading Australian research institutes and universities to focus on a number of major scientific initiatives, one being a multi-institutional haematology program which provides a major opportunity for Australian scientists to pave the way in solving the international problem of blood supply shortage.

Indeed the Australian model has produced many world leaders in this space including embryonic stem cell pioneer researcher and IVF expert, Professor Alan O. Trounson, who has just been appointed as president of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM), which is the centerpiece of California's stem cell program worth US\$3 billion.

Kelly Sims, Life Sciences Investment Director, Invest Australia North America, said, "Australia, with its long history of success and leadership in IVF technologies, was one of the very first countries in the world to identify the value and potential of stem cell research and to embark upon a legislative process to support this endeavor."

"Australian research is underpinned by nationally consistent legislation that supports embryonic stem cell research and is being updated to include somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT). This legislative framework combined with the world class science being generated from the ASCC and its partners makes Australia one of the most impressive and attractive destinations for investment in stem cell research," Sims said.

A significant tribute to Australia's strength in this field was marked in July 2007 when the Australian city of Cairns hosted the fifth conference of the International Society for Stem Cell Research - the first time this major event has been held outside North America

The Stem Cell Summit conference, sponsored jointly by the Genetics Policy Institute, Harvard Stem Cell Institute and Burrill Life Sciences Media Group, gathers the world's leading researchers and minds to address the IP, translational and regulatory challenges impacting the development of stem cell products and proposes solutions to advance commercial applications.

Editors please note:

Panel Discussion at Stem Cell Summit, Boston

The Global Perspective on Stem Cell Research

Professor Stephen Livesey, co-chair of The International Consortium of Stem Cell Networks (ICSCN) and CEO, Australian Stem Cell Centre (ASCC)

1.30pm - October 2nd, 2007

Australian Life Sciences Fast Facts

-- 427 core biotech companies operate in Australia

-- 72 listed biotechs at the end June quarter 2007

-- 49% of core biotech companies in human therapeutics 16% are agricultural companies and 13% are diagnostic companies

-- Doubling of biotech jobs from 6,000 in 2004 to over 12,000 in 2006

-- US\$30 billion market cap of listed life science companies at end June quarter 2007

-- US\$18 billion market cap of listed core biotech companies at end June quarter 2007

-- Revenue of US\$2.6 billion for listed Australian biotechs (7% increase on 2005)

-- Almost US\$450 million raised in half year to June 2007 by listed life science companies

-- In 2006, 67% of biotechnology partnerships were with overseas companies or agencies

-- Australia is ranked the number one biotech location in the Asia-Pacific region, and fifth in the world (Ernst & Young, 2005). Source: www.ey.com/global/content.nsf/International/Biotechnology_Library_Beyond_Borders_2006. (Due to its length, this URL may need to be copied/pasted into your Internet browser's address field. Remove the extra space if one exists.)

About Invest Australia - www.investaustralia.gov.au

Invest Australia, is the Australian Government's inward investment agency that helps international companies build their business in Australia and offers investors a free, comprehensive and confidential service. Between July 2002 and June 2007, Invest Australia played a verified role in attracting or facilitating 387 projects worth approximately A\$55.8 billion, with the potential to create more than 27,900 jobs and generate A\$12.6 billion in export earnings.

About the Australian Stem Cell Centre www.stemcellcentre.edu.au

The Australian Stem Cell Centre is Australia's Biotechnology Centre of Excellence. The Centre has partnered with nine leading Australian universities and research institutions and brings together a critical mass of outstanding Australian stem cell research that is internationally competitive and recognized. The Centre's principal objective is to integrate a national multi-institutional research and discovery program to develop treatments for serious disease through the application of stem cells and related technologies. The Australian Stem Cell Centre is funded by the Australian and Victorian Governments.

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