



## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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### **A\*STAR & JDRF award S\$3 million to 7 stem cell research projects in Singapore**

- 1. Seven stem cell projects in Singapore will be awarded research funding amounting to almost S\$3 million by A\*STAR's Biomedical Research Council (BMRC) and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International (JDRF), which is based in New York, USA. Out of the seven research projects, four are diabetes-related, and three are related to neural disorders. The funding is for a period of up to two years.**
2. These are the first stem cell research grants funded through the BMRC-JDRF Programme. The funding programme, which is jointly funded on a 50:50 basis, has set aside about S\$5.2 million to support stem cell research, especially in Type 1 or juvenile diabetes<sup>1</sup>, a disease which inhibits a person's ability to produce adequate insulin naturally. Such patients must therefore inject themselves with insulin several times a day.
3. Earlier this year, a grant call was made to invite applications for grants in stem cell research from both public and private research organisations in Singapore. A total of 15 applications for grants were subsequently received. They were all subject to peer review by local and international reviewers, as well as deliberation by both BMRC and JDRF.
4. "We are delighted to be partnering with JDRF in this area of research and are also happy to report that we are very satisfied with the quality of the submissions that have come in from the universities, hospitals and research institutes. We are hopeful that the seven research projects chosen will contribute to the understanding and management of diabetes and neurodegenerative diseases like Parkinson's Disease." said Associate Professor Kong Hwai Loong, Executive Director of the Biomedical Research Council.
5. "JDRF is tremendously excited about working with BMRC to fund these very promising research projects," said Margery Perry, JDRF's Chair of Research. "Stem cells hold significant potential for curing Type 1 diabetes, and the steps that these researchers are taking are critically important to moving us closer to a cure for Type

1 diabetes. We are certainly looking forward to the discoveries that will arise from these studies.”

6. Stem cells are of special importance to researchers because of their ability to act as foundation cells which give rise to all other cells, and therefore have the potential to treat a variety of human diseases such as diabetes, spinal injuries and cancer. For example, diabetes researchers who are looking for a cure for Type 1 diabetes are interested in stem cells because they have the potential to be coaxed into becoming insulin producing cells.
7. Recipients of the BMRC-JDRF grants must conform to the highest standards and strict scientific and ethical guidelines governing human stem cell research issued by the Ministry of Health in Singapore, and the Bioethics Advisory Council.
8. A complete listing and project descriptions of successful applicants will be available online at [www.a-star.edu.sg](http://www.a-star.edu.sg) from 12 November 2004.

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## **Notes to the Editor**

### **About the BMRC-JDRF collaboration**

The BMRC-JDRF collaboration has two primary aims: to promote the highest quality biomedical research in human stem cells and to expedite practical applications that would arise from an improved understanding of cell growth and differentiation in human stem cells. The research funding collaboration is the first for BMRC with a non-profit, non-governmental organisation and also JDRF's first with a Singapore partner.

### **About A\*STAR's Biomedical Research Council (BMRC)**

Singapore's Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*STAR)'s Biomedical Research Council ([www.a-star.edu.sg](http://www.a-star.edu.sg)) supports and oversees biomedical research at five national research institutes, with core competencies in bioinformatics; genomics; molecular biology; bioprocessing technology; bioengineering and nanotechnology. BMRC also encourages extramural research work and multi-disciplinary research collaborations in the wider scientific community. As part of its human capital development efforts, the Council offers research scholarships and fellowships. The Council also initiates and promotes societal awareness of biomedical research through outreach programmes.

### **About the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF)**

JDRF ([www.jdrf.org](http://www.jdrf.org)) was founded in 1970 by the parents of children with juvenile diabetes – a disease that strikes children suddenly, makes them insulin dependent for life, and carries the constant threat of devastating complications. Since inception, JDRF has provided more than \$800 million to diabetes research worldwide. More than 80 percent of JDRF's expenditures directly support research and education about research. JDRF's mission is constant: to find a cure for diabetes and its complications through the support of research.

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#### **<sup>1</sup> Type 1 (insulin-dependent or juvenile)**

Type 1 diabetes can occur at any age, but most commonly is diagnosed from infancy to the late 30s. In this type of diabetes, a person's pancreas produces little or no insulin. Although the causes are not entirely known, scientists believe the body's own defense system (the immune system) attacks and destroys the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. People with type 1 diabetes must inject insulin several times every day.