PROFILE:
The University of Maryland School of Medicine Center for Stem Cell Biology & Regenerative Medicine
Founding Director: Curt I. Civin, M.D.

In December 2008, the University of Maryland School of Medicine announced it had recruited world-renowned stem cell pioneer Curt I. Civin, M.D., as the founding director of the University of Maryland Center for Stem Cell Biology & Regenerative Medicine. Dr. Civin, a pediatric hematologist/oncologist best known for developing a method of isolating stem cells from other cells in the blood, had served as a faculty member at Johns Hopkins since 1979. He joined the University of Maryland School of Medicine in January 2009, and began formulating plans for the new University of Maryland Center for Stem Cell Biology & Regenerative Medicine. The Center encompasses all the varied multidisciplinary research into stem cells at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. It works to enhance the stem cell research enterprise at the School of Medicine.

In its first year, the new Center has begun to take shape. Its goal is to expand science's understanding of stem cell biology in order to directly affect human health and disease by developing new diagnostic methods, treatments and preventions. The Center works to accelerate discoveries in basic, translational and clinical research, in laboratories and in the clinic, using all kinds of stem cells — including adult and embryonic cells —in all models, from cellular to human.

Dr. Civin has begun reaching out to faculty members who already work in the stem cell field at the School of Medicine to include them in the Center's faculty. He's also extended invitations to such faculty at the various schools on the University of

Maryland, Baltimore campus, to invite them to have joint appointments in the Center. Because the field of stem cell research and medicine is interdisciplinary by its nature — including basic science, clinical science, public and private agencies, advocacy, ethics and law — the Center for Stem Cell Biology & Regenerative Medicine faculty will include varied experts specializing in all these fields. The Center encourages collaboration between these faculty members and even between outside scientists.

The Center's mission also is to foster interactions between the biomedical entities in the state of Maryland, not only within the University of Maryland, Baltimore. This includes possible partnerships between the School of Medicine and Johns Hopkins, the National Institutes of Health, private companies and other agencies of the State of Maryland. That includes the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund, the pool of state money that supports stem cell projects at academic research institutions and private companies.

Dr. Civin also envisions the University of Maryland Center for Stem Cell Biology & Regenerative Medicine as a home for core resources for stem cell research, for sharing with other researchers. Those core resources include facilities to produce stem cells, to differentiate them — or develop them into specific types of stem cells, such as skin or blood cells — and to bank them for research. The resources also would include an informational Web site and the coordination of online meetings, as well as training resources in the methods of stem cell research.

Despite the economic conditions, Maryland has kept its stem cell research fund strong. And even before the Center's founding, University of Maryland School of Medicine researchers earned many grants from the fund. In the fund's first three years, School of Medicine scientists received 31 grants, including 11 grants worth more than

$3.4 million in 2009. An additional goal of the Center is to keep the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund going strong by making lawmakers aware of its value to advancing this important field.

Another key element to advancing the field of stem cell research is education and outreach. The Center will develop stem cell education materials and programs for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate education in all disciplines, from science to ethics. Community education and outreach is another important component of the Center’s mission. Its faculty will work to educate the community about the science of stem cells and their potential to impact human health. They’ll work also to publicize their discoveries for the enhancement of the overall stem cell field.

Though it is not yet a year old, the Center is growing and taking shape in an exciting time for the field of stem cell science. As the federal government works through the details of loosening its restrictions on stem cell research, the American stem cell field as a whole is beginning to take a new shape. The Center is positioned to take a major role in the field. “Our dream for the new Center is to make a significant impact on curing disease,” says Dr. Civin. “That’s really what biomedical research is all about — providing better diagnoses, treatments and preventions.”

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