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Cell Biologists Praise Stem Cell Guidelines

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The American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB), a nonprofit organization representing over 10,000 basic biomedical researchers in the United States and 50 other countries, commended the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on the release of the final NIH Guidelines on Human Stem Cell Research. The ASCB was also pleased by U.S. President Obama's July 30, 2009 memorandum directing other Federal departments and agencies that conduct and support stem cell research to adopt the NIH Guidelines.

The ASCB believes that these guidelines will pave the way for responsible, ethical, and productive research that could dramatically change medical science in the years to come.

The ASCB was particularly pleased that the NIH decided to provide a process whereby stem cell lines currently used in research may become eligible for NIH funding. Failure to include these lines would have set back the field of stem cell research. Federally funded researchers would have been forced to stop their work and wait for an unknown number of new embryonic stem cell lines to be derived and made available for research. Such a halt, while detrimental to the scientific community, would have been devastating to patients around the world waiting for related treatments and cures.

The ASCB is also pleased that the NIH included in the final guidelines an NIH-administered registry of human embryonic stem cell lines eligible for NIH funding. In their letter to the NIH commenting on the draft guidelines, ASCB President Brigid Hogan and Public Policy Committee Chair Tom Pollard said, "The registry would allow researchers to review the cell lines that meet the NIH guidelines and then apply to use those cell lines." This process ensures that the already heavy administrative burden borne by researchers doesn't grow further.

The ASCB looks forward to sharing with the NIH the views of stem cell researchers about how best to implement these guidelines.