



“Tomorrow’s medicine today”?

From 9-11 October 2007, 50 participants from China and Europe met in Shanghai for the second BIONET workshop. The topic under discussion was stem cell research and the ethical challenges that surround the sourcing, manipulation and therapeutic application of pluripotent stem cells, with particular attention to the issues raised for research collaborations between Europe and China. The workshop explored similarities and differences in ethical governance, noting that there were considerable variations between European countries, and that regulatory regimes were under debate and in flux in both regions.

One of the key issues debated was that of the blurred divisions between stem cell research and therapy. Whereas most scientists stress that evidence based effective stem cell therapy with pluripotent stem cells is a long way off, sufferers of many terminal and chronic diseases can get access to clinics offering stem cell therapy in both Europe and China, often accompanied by dubious and unproven claims for therapeutic success. Indeed stem cell tourism has also become a reality as many desperate patients travel to different countries in search of some kind of treatment. Another key issue of debate concerned the moral status of biological materials, especially the human embryo. Controversies surrounding human embryonic stem cell research have led a number of scientists to seek alternative ways of creating stem cell lines for research purposes, for example by creating human-animal cybrids or by creating induced pluripotent cells. Nevertheless debates on the moral status of biological materials remain crucial in both Europe and China, and the ethical issues concerning the creation of cybrids for research remain controversial. Finally, informed consent in biological research was another key issue in both Europe and China, as was the issue of potential conflicts of interest when commercial, research and therapeutic concerns clashed at the interface of reproductive medicine and stem cell research.

The workshop report is available for download from the BIONET website: www.bionet-china.org



Ethical governance panel, Shanghai



Workshop Discussions

Ethics of Chinese-European biomedical research collaborations

The European and Chinese Expert Group on Ethical Governance of Research in the Life Sciences and Biomedicine continued its work towards preparing guidelines for best practice in the Ethical Governance of Research Collaborations in the Life Sciences and Biomedicine. The group met to discuss some of the key ethical issues facing scientists who wished to engage in scientific collaborations across the continents. Should such scientists be provided with training about the cultural and social contexts they would be working in prior to beginning research collaborations? Should a voluntary register for such collaborations be established? How should scientists take into account multiple ethical guidelines and regulations? Where should research proposals that involve collaborations be ethically reviewed? These were some of the many questions discussed at the Expert Group sessions which were chaired by Professor Christoph Rehmann-Sutter and co-chaired by Professor Qiu Renzong. The group will present an interim report at the upcoming BIONET conference on reproductive medicine and therapeutic stem cells, to be held in Changsha in April 2008.



Shanghai Institute for Advanced Studies

BIONET junior researchers network

The first round of research student exchanges was completed successfully with PhD students Joy Zhang, Rose Li and Thomas Streitfellner. Following having used the BIONET stipends to facilitate their cross-cultural research into the ethical and social implications of stem cell research in China and Europe. The junior researchers network also met in London in June 2007 to discuss and prepare their input for the Shanghai workshop. Joy Zhang and Thomas Streitfellner also gave excellent presentations at this workshop.

For the second year of the BIONET project PhD students Sui Suli, Chen Haidan and Anika Mitzkat have been awarded research stipends to facilitate travel between Europe and China for their research projects.

Changsha conference

Following two successful workshops on assisted reproductive technologies (Beijing, April 2007) and stem cell research (Shanghai, October 2007), the first BIONET conference will be held in Changsha from 1-3 April 2008. The conference, which is organised by the Institute of Reproduction and Stem Cell Engineering, Central South University and the Reproductive and Genetic Hospital CITIC-Xiangya, will bring together some of the key findings and experiences from the first two workshops. 100 participants from China and Europe will gather in

Changsha to discuss and debate differences and common ground when it comes to research collaborations in the fields of reproductive and regenerative medicine.

- What are the resources to build sufficient conditions for better ethical governance and practice in Europe and China?
- Which concepts, debates and institutional approaches can benefit good governance?
- What models can be used for governance of research collaborations between Chinese and European scientists?

These are some of the challenging questions that will be up for discussion.



Shanghai workshop participants

BIONET Roadmap

Owing to the growing importance of clinical trial research, especially in the field of pharmaco-genomics, we have slightly amended the BIONET roadmap. Workshop 3 (September 2008) will now focus on “Clinical Research and Clinical Research Organisations in EU-China research – ethics and governance issues”. The workshop will be organised by Professor Zhai Xiaomei of the Peking Union Medical College. The 4th and final workshop will be on “Biobanking and Genomic Research” and will be organised by Professor Yang Huanming of the Beijing Genomics Institute.

