

PRESS RELEASE
18 May 2008

Catholic leaders back adult stem cell research with grant

The presidents of the Catholic Bishops' conferences of England & Wales, Scotland and Ireland today announced the award of a £25,000 grant, funded from a special Day for Life collection, to support adult stem cell research in the UK.

The donation has been made to Novussanguis, an international research consortium on cord blood and adult stem cells for therapeutic aims that was launched in Paris on 14 May, 2008.

"We support scientific research that seeks to cure disease and suffering," said the Cardinals.

"The HFE Bill has focused on embryonic stem cell research. In fact, much greater progress has already been made towards clinical therapies using adult stem cells. Other emerging techniques hold potential for good, without creating and destroying human embryos. We are making this donation as a sign of the Church's commitment to science and human good.

"We also welcome the positive engagement with scientists and ethicists last Friday, which identified the need for continued dialogue. This meeting re-enforced the fact that there are profound questions both about the scientific efficacy of proposed techniques and their ethical justification.

"In particular, we would ask:

- What ethical considerations should limit bio-medical research?
- Should the government be taking the dramatic step of legalising research on cybrid or hybrid embryos just as new techniques are emerging which would make the use of such hybrids in research redundant?
- To what extent is the UK in danger of neglecting more promising therapies by focusing too much on embryonic stem cell research?

"Not nearly enough time has been given to discussing these issues and these questions require answers before and not after legislation."

+Sean Cardinal Brady, Archbishop of Armagh, President of the Bishops' Conference of Ireland

+Cormac Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, President of the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales

+Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien, Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland

Day for Life

Day for Life is the day in the Church's year dedicated to celebrating the sacredness of life from conception to natural death. It is a joint project between the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England & Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Every year the Day for Life a different theme is chosen; recent years have focused on the elderly, the disabled and the unborn. This year the theme is mental health; helping to raise awareness of the needs of those affected by mental ill-health.

The Scottish Day for Life takes place on 31 May, the English and Welsh Day for Life on 6 July and the Irish Day for Life on 5 October.

Novussanguis

Novussanguis is an international research consortium on cord blood and adult stem cells for therapeutic aims

Professor Colin McGuckin and the research group on cord blood at Newcastle University and the Fondation Jérôme Lejeune in Paris created *Novussanguis* to promote responsible research on cord blood and adult stem cells. Up to 200 international participants attended the launch of this consortium on Wednesday 14 May at the Medical School of University Paris Descartes, in France.

The launch is supported by the French Research Minister, Ms Valérie Pécresse and placed under the Patronage of Mr Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament.

Cord blood and adult stem cells are very attractive for research in cell therapy and regenerative medicine because of their high differentiation and expansion potential. Adult stem cells can be harvested from several human tissues such as brain, bone marrow, peripheral blood, liver, cornea, retina, and pancreas. It is also possible to find stem cells in umbilical cord blood. With over 130 million births per year worldwide, cord blood is a particularly important source of readily available stem cells in terms of access and supply.

Adult stem cells play a key role in research for treatment of several diseases. Today, over 80 diseases are treatable with cord blood stem cells, mostly linked to the blood system (e.g. leukaemia) or the immune system ('babies in a bubble'), but also diseases affecting the bone marrow, nervous system, heart or metabolism such as juvenile diabetes.