

COMECE blij met toekenning Nobelprijs Geneeskunde

COMECE welcomes today's announcement of the Nobel Prize for Medicine for research on alternatives to embryonic stem cells research

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The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2012 was awarded jointly to John B Gurdon (UK) and Shinya Yamanaka (Japan) "for the discovery that mature cells can be reprogrammed to become pluripotent".

This is an important milestone in recognising the key role that non-embryonic stem cells play in the development of new, medical therapies, as alternatives to human embryonic stem cells (hESC). Accordingly, in the ambit of the new Horizon 2020 Research Programme, funding should be redirected from ethically-problematic and scientifically and economically less promising hESC research to non-embryonic stem cell research.

From the scientific point of view, hESC have been so far rather disappointing, less and less fulfilling clinical promise. It is noteworthy that recently GeronCorp., the world's leading embryo research company, announced it was closing down its stem cell programme.

In contrast, there have been continuing scientific advances in fields of research involving alternative stem cells (adult, derived from umbilical cord or induced pluripotent) which present better prospects for clinical applications; or have indeed already demonstrated widespread clinical results (and do not raise any special ethical problems). Today's Nobel Prize rewards such efforts to discover alternatives to hESC in mature, specialised cells that once reprogrammed become immature cells capable of developing into any tissues of the body.

Furthermore, research on hESC can no longer be patented since the recent ruling of the European Court of Justice in the case of *Greenpeace v. Brüstle*. The Court clearly defines the human embryo as a human ovum, as soon as fertilized, or as the product of cloning, and confirms that biotechnological inventions using hESC cannot be patented.

Despite all these new scientific developments and legal decisions, the European Commission decided to leave open the possibility of funding research on hESC within the Horizon 2020 Research Programme which is currently under discussion in the EU Council and the European Parliament.

COMECE requests the EU institutions to adopt a rule laying down that any research entailing the destruction of human embryos or using human embryonic stem cells shall not be funded under Horizon 2020.