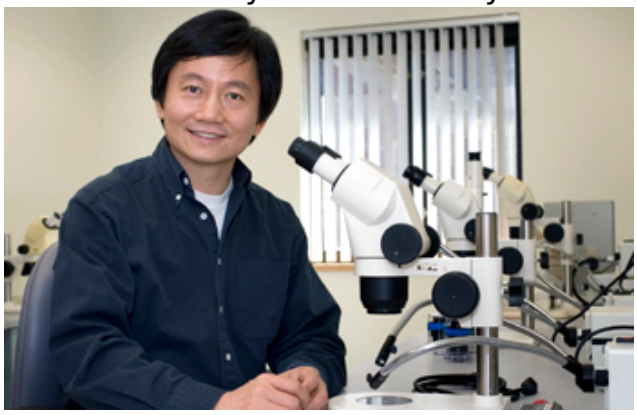
Li Ka Shing Foundation makes $1.5 million donation to boost Yale stem cell research

Yale UniversityYale University



Haifan Lin

New Haven, Conn. — The Li Ka Shing Foundation (LKSF), a Hong Kong-based philanthropy devoted to advancing education and healthcare, has awarded $1.5 million to Yale University to expand two research core facilities, the human embryonic stem cell core and the genomics core, of the Yale Stem Cell Center (YSCC). The funding provides the Center's scientists with new capacity and resources for advancing research on stem cell biology at Yale. Stem cell research has the potential to reveal the most fundamental mechanisms underlying cell differentiation, the influence of genetic/non genetic factors, organ development, and ultimately how systems critical to the body's function perform. This research can transform medical treatment of numerous serious illnesses and allow the repair or replacement of tissues and organs damaged by trauma or disease.

"We are grateful for the Li Ka Shing Foundation's generosity, which benefits today's medical research in order to develop tomorrow's cures," said Yale University President Richard Levin. "This significant donation will allow the Yale Stem Cell Center to continue to make available to its members the most current technologies used in stem cell research."

The YSCC, located at Yale School of Medicine (YSM), is directed by Haifan Lin, a world-renowned stem cell researcher whose "lead-by-science" approach stresses the importance of understanding stem cells' basic biology before adapting stem cell technology to treat individual diseases. "We have all been great admirers of the work of Yale for 100 years in China," said LKSF Director Solina Chau in a recent phone interview following her 2010 visit to Yale. "The team at Yale seems to be very open, and wants to support and leverage each other's work to accelerate science. At the Stem Cell Center, I felt that Haifan has developed a unique sense of community and bonding between the different teams."

YSCC research is helping to explain stem cells' unique ability to form self-renewing

populations that can differentiate into the myriad cell types that make up the body's organs, a property that may be harnessed in novel treatments for cancer, type 1 diabetes, heart disease, neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, and brain and spinal cord injuries. Yale scientists are now also producing and using human stem cell-like lines, called iPS cells, which are available from easily accessible adult cells, such as skin cells, sidestepping the need for embryonic cells and ensuring a genetic match with patients. The Li Ka Shing Foundation supports this new effort.

"We are grateful to the Li Ka Shing Foundation for its support and its vision towards stem cell research. We are especially excited that this support will allow us to establish the new iPS cell lines using technology that does not require the use of human embryonic cells," said Lin, Professor of Cell Biology and Genetics at YSM. "In addition, this donation will increase our genomics core's capacity by upgrading our DNA sequencing software and expanding computing power at the Center."

About the Li Ka Shing Foundation

The LKSF was established in 1980 by Mr. Li Ka-shing, Chairman of the Cheung Kong Group, a global concern based in Hong Kong with a combined market capitalization of more than US$115 billion. Mr. Li has pledged one-third of his assets to the Foundation, which he refers to as his "third son." To date, LKSF has made charitable donations of more than HK$12.5 billion (US$1.6 billion).

LKSF supports projects that propel social progress and create a cycle of charity in the world through expanding access to quality education and healthcare, encouraging cultural diversity and exploration, and stimulating community involvement and sustainable development.

About the Yale Stem Cell Center

Established in 2006 with initial funding from Yale University and the State of Connecticut, the YSCC is a scientific hub for stem cell researchers across the Yale campus. With core facilities available to scientists of both Yale School of Medicine and Yale's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the Center's mission is to advance the understanding of stem cell biology and to harness its potential to improve human health. In addition to housing core research facilities, the Center promotes intellectual exchange and interdisciplinary scientific collaborations among its more than sixty members.

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