The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) is a state agency charged with accelerating stem cell research through the dispersal of $3 billion in funds for stem cell research. CIRM is partnering with Stem Cells Translational Medicine to launch the "Proceedings of the California Stem Cell Agency," a monthly series of commentaries, articles, interviews, webinars, forums, and concise reviews on a wide range of topics in regenerative medicine.

INTRODUCTION
This year, California will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the passage of Proposition 71, the state ballot initiative that led to the creation of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM), a state agency charged with accelerating stem cell research through the dispersal of $3 billion in funds for stem cell research. To mark this event, CIRM is partnering with Stem Cells Translational Medicine to launch the "Proceedings of the California Stem Cell Agency," a monthly series of commentaries, articles, interviews, webinars, forums, and concise reviews on a wide range of topics in regenerative medicine.

CIRM, its grantees, and its partners are united in the mission of improving the health and quality of life for millions of people with chronic diseases and injuries. We aim to ease human suffering while staving off an impending "silver tsunami" of economic costs associated with the long-term health care of an aging and increasingly debilitated population.

Under our direction as series co-editors, the Proceedings will create a dynamic forum for the broad international community of scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders engaged in stem cell research. CIRM is staffed by 29 Ph.D.s and M.D.s representing a broad range of expertise in the science, policy, and communication of stem cell research. They work closely with local, national, and international communities to examine—on an ongoing basis—a wide range of topics pertinent to advancing regenerative medicine. Once we realized that these activities in community engagement, policymaking, and scientific stewardship might be of keen interest to this readership and beyond, we partnered with Stem Cells Translational Medicine to give the CIRM community’s collective voice a home.

In this issue, we launch the Proceedings with a Perspective on clinical trial data sharing—a thorny issue that continues to spur worldwide debate and one for which the regenerative medicine community can shape the discussion at an early stage [1]. Forthcoming Proceedings will include articles such as policy and scientific considerations surrounding the creation of induced pluripotent stem cell (iPSC) banks; the global regulatory environment for developing stem cell-based therapies; and reports from various focused workshops, such as on bottlenecks in research on Parkinson’s disease and ocular disorders, as well as progress in research to generate blood and liver tissues.

CIRM, as the product of a citizen-initiated, pioneering entrepreneurial experiment, occupies a unique status among public enterprises advancing stem cell-based science. We, the Proceedings co-editors, both joined CIRM at the very start of a period in which CIRM projects began their initial advance toward the clinic. We are excited and gratified to see many of these programs successfully advance through early discussions with the Food and Drug Administration and investigational new drug application filings to initiating clinical trials for patients. Remarkably, some are the fruits of CIRM’s investments in basic biology, emphasizing the importance of the foundational research and infrastructure CIRM has built in its short lifespan (see Summary on next page).

In 2013, CIRM began a phase of innovation initiatives, launching several strategic centers aimed at nucleating an international network to accelerate all phases of stem cell research ranging from basic discovery to clinical trials. In the fall of 2013, CIRM launched an iPSC bank for disease modeling and drug discovery for...
genetically complex diseases. In March 2014, CIRM kicked off a Center of Excellence for stem cell genomics to advance application of genomics and bioinformatics for stem cell scientists statewide and to support resource-intensive center-initiated stem cell genomics projects. At the end of 2014, CIRM will launch the Alpha Stem Cell Clinics Network, a hub for statewide, national, and international clinical trials and, eventually, centers of excellence for delivery of approved therapies. At the heart of all these initiatives lie the communities of international scientists, stakeholders, patient advocates, peer reviewers for grants, and the network of committed partners who share the mission.

We hope you find the “Proceedings of the California Stem Cell Agency” interesting, informative, and inspiring. We welcome you to the discussion.

Ellen G. Feigal, M.D.
Natalie D. DeWitt, Ph.D.

Since its launch, CIRM has helped to build 12 state-of-the art research facilities in California, attracted 130 stem cell biology research leaders to the state, supported training of nearly a thousand scientists and skilled laboratory staff, awarded funding to support over 600 research projects leading to over 1800 published papers, and funded over 90 translational projects. These preclinical proof of concept and development candidates extend across a broad spectrum of therapeutic approaches (namely stem cell products, gene-modified stem cells small molecules, and biologics), as well as therapeutic areas. Twenty-six of these projects are moving toward or into clinical testing, with two clinical trials already launched and enrolling patients. CIRM expects to advance 10 projects—all with funding initiated within the past four years— into the clinic by the end of 2014.

REFERENCES

1 Lomax GP, DeWitt ND, Millan MT et al. How CIRM research programs support science and regulatory policy. STEM CELLS TRANSLATIONAL MEDICINE 2014 [Epub ahead of print].