European Biotech Company Biocell Center Opens First U.S. Facility for Preservation of Amniotic Stem Cells in Medford Massachusetts

First company that banks amniotic stem cells for families, researchers

MEDFORD, MA (Oct. 22, 2009) – Biocell Center, a European biotechnology company that is the only firm to harvest and preserve amniotic stem cells, announced today that it is expanding its tissue bank and research operations to serve families, medical centers and scientists in the United States.

The company officially opened its North American headquarters and laboratory today in Medford, Massachusetts, in the heart of the Boston area's biotechnology hub. The company has other facilities in Italy and Switzerland. Company officials were joined at the announcement by Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, Massachusetts Life Sciences Center President and CEO Dr. Susan Windham-Bannister, MassBio President and CEO Robert Coughlin, and Paolo Alli, Chief of the Cabinet of Governor Formigoni in Italy's Lombardia Region.

In June of 2008, Governor Patrick signed into law the Massachusetts Life Sciences Initiative, a ten-year, $1 billion commitment to maintaining and strengthening the life sciences as a major economic engine for the Commonwealth.

"The Life Sciences Initiative was designed to bring jobs to Massachusetts and support vital research," said Governor Deval Patrick. "We are thrilled that Biocell Center is opening its North American headquarters in Medford and welcome them to a diverse group of pioneering companies that are making Massachusetts a global leader in stem cell research."

Biocell Center scientists have developed a method of preserving stem cells derived from amniotic fluid.

Biocell Center (www.biocellcenter.com) captures the stem cells from amniotic fluid if the family requests it and pays for the preservation of the stem cells. Families can choose whether to give written consent for use of the stem cells in research.

The first few milliliters of amniotic fluid withdrawn during amniocentesis, which typically would be discarded, are sent to the Biocell Center laboratory. The stem cells are frozen in liquid nitrogen and preserved in the company's state-of-the-art cryo-bank.

Multiple research studies have demonstrated that amniotic stem cells are pluripotent, i.e. able to differentiate into various cell types, and are considered particularly valuable because of their high capacity to proliferate.

“The medical community worldwide is already using stem cells for organ and tissue regeneration and even more important medical breakthrough applications are foreseen in the future treatment of diabetes, pathologic tissue and organ damage, neurodegenerative, hematologic and other diseases,” says Dr. Giuseppe Simoni, Scientific Director of Biocell Center, who is well known in the field of medical genetics for developing a method for the diagnosis of fetal chromosomal matter during early pregnancy, a technique that is still used as a standard guideline procedure.

He pointed out that stem cells from amniotic fluid can be used for both allogenic donations and autologous use, and are often compatible between siblings.

“With strong growth in Europe, Biocell Center now will provide pregnant women across North America who are having an amniocentesis for prenatal diagnosis the opportunity to bank stem cells derived from their amniotic fluid,” says Kate Torchilin, CEO of Biocell Center Corp. “These cells can potentially be used in the future to treat various diseases and for tissue regeneration.

Biocell Chooses Massachusetts for its US Headquarters

“Biocell Center selected Massachusetts because of its high concentration of leading medical centers and research institutions,” sai Biocell Center CEO Dr. Kate Torchilin. “It’s a rich environment for establishing partnerships and advancing research in the area of amniotic stem cell cryo-banking and research.

State and local officials commended the company for choosing Massachusetts as the location for its North American headquarters.

Dr. Susan Windham-Bannister, President & CEO of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, the quasi-public agency charged with implementing the state’s Life Sciences Initiative, said, “Massachusetts is a great place to do business for life sciences companies, both international and domestic, and we welcome Biocell Center to the world’s leading life sciences SuperCluster.”

“We look forward to continuing the growing partnership between Massachusetts and the life sciences clusters in Italy,” she added.

“Biocell Center’s decision to grow in Massachusetts highlights the strength of the cluster here in the Commonwealth and the capacity for industry stakeholders to work together to get things done,” said Robert Coughlin, President & CEO of MassBio, who worked with member companies DTZ FHO Partners, Sullivan & Worcester and Cummings Properties to help Biocell Center with its expansion. “We’re thrilled to have such a cutting-edge, growing, global company join the Massachusetts SuperCluster.”

Medford Mayor Michael McGlynn commented, “We’re pleased to welcome Biocell Center to the City of Medford as we continue to expand our economic base and create new jobs.”

The privately-held company's scientists will also be collaborating in the field of amniotic stem cell clinical research with leading hospitals and scientific groups in Boston and other areas of the country.

"I am looking forward to learning more about BioCell's work and am excited to hear that they are locating in Medford," said State Senator Pat Jehlen (D-Somerville), who represents Medford in the State Senate. "BioCell has identified the important factors that make Massachusetts a good place for such companies to locate. Proximity to medical centers, research institutions, and other biotech companies leads to important opportunities for collaboration and cross-fertilization. I had not realized the importance of connections to Europe for this and similar companies, and I will be interested to learn more about the role of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center and MassBio in assisting their location here."

"I am pleased to welcome Biocell Center to Medford and am proud that they have chosen our community as their first North American location," said Representative Paul Donato (D-Medford).

"In a time of fiscal challenges, the state has been working hard to grow and preserve our economic opportunities," said Representative Carl Sciortino (D-Somerville), who represents a portion of Medford. "It is good to see businesses opening in our community, bringing jobs and economic growth. I want to welcome Biocell Center to Medford and offer my congratulations on the opening of their North American headquarters in our community."

"This is great news for our community and Massachusetts," said Representative Sean Garballey (D-Arlington), who represents a portion of Medford. "Biocell Center's investment in the Commonwealth is a testament to our capable workforce"

Biocell Center Opening Events
The official opening took place this morning (Oct. 22) at 10 a.m. at the Biocell Center, 200 Boston Ave. in Medford, and will be followed tomorrow by a symposium with presentations by leading researchers in the field of stem cell research from 12:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. The symposium, co-sponsored by Biocell Center, TOMA Labs and Sintetica SA, and organized in cooperation with the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, MassBio and the Region of Lombardia, Italy, will be held at MassBio's One Cambridge Center offices. Symposium schedule: http://www.massbio.org/events/calendar/587-amniotic_and_other_mesenchymal_stem_cells-/event_detail

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