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Australian to head state's stem cell program

Alan Trounson a pioneer in stem cell research

By Terri Somers

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SAN DIEGO – Alan O. Trounson, an Australian pioneer in invitro fertilization and human embryonic stem cell research, has been named president of the institute that is leading California's \$3 billion stem cell program.

Hiring the 61-year-old is viewed as a coup for California's ground-breaking institute because of his research resume, his entrepreneurial and management abilities and his experience navigating Australia's rocky political climate on human embryonic stem cell research.

Trounson, who founded Australia's Stem Cell Center in 2003, is well known globally for his work in stem cell and human fertilization. His appointment was approved unanimously late Friday by the board of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine.

"I have great respect for Alan as a scientific colleague and a deeply ethical and moral individual who will provide great leadership to the CIRM in coming years," said Larry Goldstein, an embryonic stem cell researcher at the University of California San Diego who has collaborated with Trounson.

Trounson is expected to start work within 120 days. He will give up his lab, move to California and make the stem cell institute his full-time job, receiving a salary of either \$475,000 or \$490,000 depending on whether the state covers his moving expenses. He will not hold stock in companies that do stem cell reserach.

Richard Murphy, 63, the former president of the Salk Institute in La Jolla, has served as interim president of the stem cell institute since Sept. 1. Murphy was hired to temporarily run the institute after the retirement of its first president, Zach Hall, who left in April.

Hall, 69, a neurobiologist who ran an institute at the National Institutes of Health, stayed in the job for two years even though he originally took it on an interim basis.

Trounson, an agricultural scientist, started his research career working on cattle reproduction.

In the mid-1970s, he developed techniques for non-surgical embryo collection and transfer in cattle and pioneered the technique of freezing embryos from farm animals and embryo slipping.

In 1977, Carl Wood, considered a father of invitro fertilization in Australia, convinced Trounson to begin working in human IVF. Trounson's work included cryopreservation of human embryos, donation of human eggs and embryos and superovulation for IVF in humans.

In the early 1990s, he began work on embryonic stem cells, their differentiation, transplantation and gene therapy.

His work since then has centered on human reproduction and genetics, stem cell biology, cell differentiation and cell cloning, as well as embryo and tissue banking.

As well as founding the Australian Stem Cell Centre at Monash University in 2003, Trounson has founded or co-founded eight companies. Among those companies is globally recognized Embryonic Stem Cells International in Singapore.

Started in 2000 with angel investor money and investment from Singapore's research-loving government, Embryonic Stem Cells International holds the commercial rights and intellectual property to the initial six embryonic stem cell lines developed by the founders, who include Ariff Bongso, a Singapore IVF specialist considered to be a pioneer in deriving stem cells from human embryos.

The company's embryonic stem cell lines are among those recognized by the U.S. government for federal funding, meaning they were created before August 2001 restrictions on funding for stem cell research.

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