



The Promises and Challenges of Regenerative Medicine (Ernst Schering Foundation Symposium Proceedings)

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It has long been known that amphibia and other lower order vertebrates have the capacity to regenerate limbs as well as damaged hearts or brains. Over the past decade, there has been a major change in the way that the potential for regeneration in mammals is viewed. Earlier, in contrast to the acceptance of regeneration in amphibia, it was generally believed that there was very limited if any capacity for regeneration in many mammalian organ systems such as the heart and brain. The discovery of tissue-resident adult stem cells and the description of the properties of embryonic stem cells have altered this view. This change in paradigm has led to the hope that these discoveries can be harnessed in medical practice to cure chronic disabling diseases. The use of tissue-resident adult stem cells depends on the ability to either mobilize them or to convert them from one lineage to another. These problems do not arise with embryonic stem cells. Instead, their use is fraught with ethical and political issues as well as the question of how to direct their differentiation toward the desired cell type. Whichever approach is taken, issues of safety have to be paramount. In particular, the role of stem cells in tumorigenesis is critical in assessing their potential clinical utility. The Ernst Schering Research Foundation and the Riken Center on Developmental Biology jointly organized a workshop on The Promises and Challenges of Regenerative Medicine, which took place in Kobe, Japan on 20-22 October 2004. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the present state of knowledge and future directions in this important field. Leading basic scientists and clinicians reviewed and discussed several timely topics within three main themes: (1) evolution, development, and regeneration, including stem cells in Planaria and stem cell niches; (2) embryonic and adult stem cells, including a discussion of the regulatory system in Japan for human embryonic stem cells; and (3) regeneration in specific indications including a discussion of the role of stem cells in organs such as the skin, brain, liver, pancreas, cornea, and the cardiovascular system. In addition, the role of stem cells in glioblastoma was presented along with the implications for other tumors.

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