

**MINUTES OF THE
MARYLAND STEM CELL RESEARCH COMMISSION**
Monday, July 10, 2023
Virtual Meeting

Members:

Mary Armanios
Rachel Brewster, Vice Chair
Margaret Conn Himelfarb
Debra Mathews
David Mosser
Linda Powers
Ira Schwartz
Curt Van Tassell

Staff:

Ben Antebi, MSCRF
Troy LeMaile-Stovall, TEDCO
Ruchika Nijhara, MSCRF
Sabrina Spinner, MSCRF

The Commission meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m.

I. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes from the May 1, 2023, meeting. A motion was made and seconded to approve the meeting minutes as modified. The motion passed (*7 in favor, 1 abstention*).

II. Executive Director Report

Dr. Ruchika Nijhara presented the Executive Director's Report, which focused on the following:

A. 2023 MSCRF Awardee Felicitations Ceremony

MSCRF recently hosted an inaugural event on June 8, 2023, to highlight the scientists from Maryland-based research institutions and companies who were granted MSCRF awards during Fiscal Year 2023. Their invaluable contributions to accelerating breakthroughs in stem cell research were acknowledged and celebrated. The event was very well attended and received great feedback from the attendees.

B. 2023 ISSCR/MSCRF Focus Session

Dr. Nijhara and Dr. Antebi attended and participated in the ISSCR annual conference held in Boston from June 14 -17, 2023. MSCRF organized a focus session entitled "Bench to Bedside – MSCRF Accelerating Cures and Beyond", emphasizing the significant impact of MSCRF funding on advancing the field of stem cell and regenerative medicine. The session provided an opportunity for MSCRF awardees to present their groundbreaking work, which highlighted MSCRF's different funding programs ranging from early discovery to clinical applications, including the new manufacturing assistance program. Overall, the focus session was well attended from all over the globe and received positive feedback. As one of the sponsors of the conference, MSCRF gained visibility and recognition worldwide.

C. ORI Letter - Update

A letter was sent to the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at Johns Hopkins University regarding potential research misconduct concerning a duplicate post-doctoral application. Dr. Nijhara indicated the ORI received the letter and is looking into the matter. Dr. Nijhara will keep the Commission informed of the outcome.

D. Research Integrity Compliance Requirement - Update

To avoid potential research misconduct from future applicants, research integrity/ethics guidelines were added to the applicant submission portal to ensure applicants acknowledge and comply with standard research integrity requirements analogous to those of the NIH.

III. Policy Discussions:

NIH Guidelines

Dr. Brewster indicated that the NIH recently modified their guidelines for publications, data sharing, and validation of reagents. During the discussion, there was a consensus to revisit the language currently in the MSCRF grant agreements, compare it to the modified NIH guidelines, and engage in a detailed discussion to determine which NIH guidelines to potentially adopt. After the discussion, there was a consensus to revisit this topic with the full commission prior to casting a vote. The discussion was tabled for a future meeting.

MSCRF Award Budgets

Dr. Nijhara presented a brief overview of the existing MSCRF program budget amounts and term durations. A few recommendations were made: (1) to increase the Clinical funding limit up to \$2M, and the Validation funding limit up to \$350K; (2) to create a new funding mechanism to foster and incentivize collaboration between academia and companies within Maryland. After the discussion, there was a consensus to thoroughly discuss this topic with the full commission prior to a vote. The discussion was tabled for a future meeting.

CAR-T Therapy/Regenerative Medicine

Dr. Nijhara provided a brief overview of the current state of cell therapy and regenerative medicine as background to initiate the discussion on potentially expanding MSCRF funding to cell therapy/CAR-T therapy projects. The Commission discussed (1) the pros and cons of funding research that significantly involves the use of stem cells versus funding research that is focused on cell therapy that involves CAR-T cells; (2) if solely CAR-T projects fall within the statutory mission of the Commission/Fund; (3) if there should be a cap on funded disease targets to avoid over-funding specific disease targets, such as cancer. After the discussion, there was a consensus to revisit this topic with the full commission prior to a vote. The discussion was tabled for a future meeting.

Collecting Demographic Data from Applicants/Awardees

Dr. Nijhara initiated a brief discussion on whether to collect demographic data from applicants. A recommendation was made to collect demographic data during the application process but to make it optional for the applicant. There was a consensus to revisit the recommendation with the full commission prior to a vote. The discussion was tabled for a future meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:51 p.m.