

Behind stem-cell rules' heed and re-open for trials in China

Opinion

Applaud China for launching trials of embryonic stem cells. Studies to treat vision loss and Parkinson's disease are the pilot to go ahead under new regulations.¹ Almost 5 years ago, 'China's stem-cell rules go unheeded'² has been raised for stem cell therapy (SCT) in China. However, it has neglected that such rules' heed is inextricable from China cultural and tradition contexts. For our society, China has tri-systems (laws, the regulations of Communist party and traditional "moral" values). The religion, the definition of "success", "integrity" and "kindness" could be unique. For example, in order to free the psychological and economic burdens of family, some patients with complex diseases, such as cancer, neurodegenerative diseases, even rheumatic arthritis or osteoarthritis will commit suicide. China, where suicide is definitely a cultural problem.³ One among them is my old uncle with rheumatic arthritis and late osteoarthritis too. Therefore, if an experimental SCT for joint pain is promising, I would not exclude it for him, that is, to hinder him suicide. A few years ago, as one lifelong smoker, my father-in-law experienced with diagnosis of cancer marker. Since he refused any expansive standard therapy and solely relied on his cheap Chinese medicine, consequently passed away at his early 60s. If any protocol of SCT on cancer is affordable⁴ even though imperfect, why not to try? In fact, one relative of my close friend has suffered cancer and did stem cell therapy so as to live 2 years longer than medical doctor initially defined.

For certain, an ideal law and regulatory system will need a long-term evolution and journey in China, obviously, the lives for many desperate patients in China can not stay that long. If not well balanced, *just to pursue perfect* might be one mistake itself. For technology progress, the contribution to international research on embryonic and induced stem cells during last two decades by China was more than 20%. Indeed, China government should make efforts to kick-off some bugs, but keep a balance to avoid unnecessary restrictive regulations that could stagger SCT achievements. When viewed from a wide angle, it is essential to have a thriving international research diversity including China elements (e.g. *traditional herbal medicine, acupuncture*). Finally, the reality is different from the logic. As

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expected, the SCT rules go "heeded" in most of hospitals in China but in its own style, likely the "grey" area does exist to make balance. The first clinical trials of ES cells are now under regulations that China adopted in 2015, filling up the gap previously lacking for clear regulatory framework, attempting to ensure the ethical and safe use of stem cells in the clinic, and preventing companies to market unproven stem-cell treatments.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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