

U.S. rejects three stem cell patents

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The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office has issued a preliminary rejection of three stem cell patents held by the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The patents were rejected because the discoveries by researcher James Thomson were "obvious to one of ordinary skill," the patent office said.

The Wisconsin State Journal says the non-profit Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation will appeal the rejection.

The patents, which cover virtually all stem cell research in the country, have brought in at least \$3.2 million and "could net much more money before they expire in 2015," the newspaper said.

Companies wanting to study the cells must buy licenses costing \$75,000 to \$400,000. The newspaper said WARF recently started waiving the fees if the research is conducted at universities or by non-profit groups.

Critics of the patents say the fees have driven some stem cell research overseas.

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